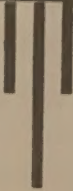




# TIME'S TRAVELERS

— BY —

STANTON A. COBLENTZ



*Preface by Lord Dunsany*

THE WINGS PRESS



MILL VALLEY, CALIF.

1952

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Stanton A. Coblenz

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## P R E F A C E

It is not for me from three thousand miles away to say who is the greatest living poet on the continent of America; I can only say who is the greatest one that I know. I am only like an early astronomer picking out such large stars as he can see with the naked eye. And the greatest poet I can see to the west is Stanton Coblentz, and the greatest novelist in Europe Giono, and the best novelist now working in Ireland, Anne Crone, and its best living short-story writer Mary Lavin; the greatest living poet writing in English, de la Mare; while in the constellation of all the women poets of England, I see Lady Wentworth's star burning very brightly. These are large stars that I see, and of course I see the nearer ones more clearly. How many I miss in the distance I do not know, as early astronomers missed suns in the Milky Way.

I first became aware of Stanton Coblentz's work when, a few years after its publication, I read *The Pageant of Man*. So tremendous a title needed a great deal of justification; and it was justified. Here, again, we have an imposing title, but it is not too grand for its theme. For Stanton Coblentz fulfills the old idea of the bard, who was both singer and prophet. With a vast vision, sometimes stepping aside to look at our planet from "the midstream of the Milky Way," and sometimes peering close at the lives of men and women in streets and offices of American cities, he examines the way of life; and one feels as he lays down this book that one has read one of the prophets. And we surely need a prophet in our time. Why are there so few? Perhaps because our time is so intricate that they can make nothing of it. But here is one. And let not anyone say, "Just tell me what his message is," perhaps adding, "just in a few words, I mean. I can't waste half an hour." Considering the vastness of his theme, Stanton Coblentz gives his message in a few words; but he takes about 3,500 lines over it, and I cannot condense it into fewer still. What he mostly does is to put side by side the things that matter and the things men seek, missing the things that matter. And after many such comparisons, from which the reader may



notice how happiness can be missed, he gives us a glimpse of the unity of things, and of aims and purposes that are in harmony with them.

However difficult I find it to write of the message of this book in the few words appropriate to a preface, or indeed in any number of words, it is more difficult still to write of the beauty of its rhythms. For meter has always seemed to me to be pure magic, something handed down to us from ages that wrote spells upon paper and accomplished wonders with them; and how a certain arrangement of ten syllables will carry a thought into the minds of men, to leave it dancing there forever, I can no more tell you than I can tell you how to write a spell that will turn a prince into a toad. Possibly Milton knew this, though I doubt that he did, and expect that he merely felt it. Stanton Coblentz, before he trod this flowery path of meter, cleared a great many weeds out of the way, removing them with a sickle of prose, and in his book, *New Poetic Lamps and Old*, he exposes the whole fabric of the modern nonsense-verse, which obeying some hidden law or curse, always forsakes meaning as soon as it has forsaken meter. These weeds had to be cleared out of the way, since once a habit is formed of accepting sheer nonsense as poetry because there might be some sense in it that one cannot see, no one will trouble to find meaning when it is there, and so all messages will be missed.

All nations need a prophet, and I believe America has one here; and one with the prophet's wide vision and the poet's clear insight. Vividly clear is his gaze into the hearts of a couple, a young man and an actress, to whom love comes, to the delight of both, till the young man tells the girl that when they are married she will no longer have to toil for her livelihood night after night on the stage; and she knows that her whole life and soul are a very part of the stage, and he cannot understand.

But I will not attempt to explain the philosophy of this book. I only recommend it to the reader. And I need hardly say that such a message is needed. Merely to glance again at a few of these pages is to confirm my first belief, that here is a prophet, a seer and a bard.

LORD DUNSANY

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## PART I

### M Y S T E R Y

#### I

This little life, with shallow roots in time  
Frailer than grass against the sickled years,  
Can search the night, can throb with will to climb  
Above the ages and the curtained spheres,  
And seek the reason for the wrecked careers  
Of worlds and men, and great Orion's glowing,  
And all the May-fly ecstasies and griefs  
Of babes and dotards, cherry blossoms blowing,  
Torn faith, and love that founders on the reefs.  
Always the What and Why  
Of this mysterious world, like some dark gale,  
Has beaten round my ears, and I have viewed  
The towers of earth, her meadows, hills and sky  
As warders of some untranslated tale,  
Invisible to the mob's snatch-penny mood.

Out of old stabbing moments when I felt  
The challenge of the Mystery of Things  
Prick me and goad me; when a wound was dealt  
That stunned, and made me wish a lens and wings,  
Some points of fire still shine  
Indelibly from youth's horizon-line.  
Upon a night of childhood long ago  
I peered, wide-lidded, at the kindled dots  
Flecking the midstream of the Milky Way,  
And heard my father say,  
"Those eyes of light that seem to us below  
Mere flickering candle-spots,  
Are worlds, whose heaven-ascending beams may warm



People like us, or blaze on men of other form."  
And as I listened, silently a door  
Was opened, and I looked beyond the gloom  
To many and many a far enchanted shore  
Of weirdness and magnificence and doom  
That tempted and taunted.

Thus my earliest glance  
Into the miracle of Things That Are. . . .  
And years went glimmering by; I traveled far  
Across the torrent days of youth; and stood  
One night alone, caught in a dreamer's trance,  
And gazed beyond the clouds' blown, opening hood  
Into the constellations rolling on  
Like signals from the Timeless and Immense.  
Then suddenly there surged on me a sense  
Of inexpressible power; I was borne  
Skyward on wings of light  
As though I were co-equal with that span  
Of ever-turning globes,  
And leapt from height to height and still to further height,  
A something-more-than-man,  
Who had escaped one moment from these robes  
Of time and dust. Deeply within my breast,  
Like the long-slumbering larger part of me,  
New forces dawned unguessed,  
And that expanded moment bade me see  
All this tempestuous self of toil and play  
Is a dark lamp, its tapers still unlit;  
For man is greater than the worldlings say,  
And shares the handclasp of the Infinite.  
And oh, the glory of that midnight spell,  
The holy sense that finally all is well,  
Is something words are phantom-pale to tell!  
Though soon, too soon the mood  
Fled as the clouds drew round,  
And after those grave peaks of solitude  
Once more I walked the wingless common ground.



## II

There came a later night,  
Still in my youth's gray-chequered travail-time,  
When I sat pondering by the study-light,  
Pruning my first rude weedy shoots of rhyme.  
And like a stroke  
From some invisible archer, flew a dart  
That pierced me, till I gasped, and with a start  
Listened as some weird voice within awoke,  
"Why all these men that breed and struggle? Why?  
And what am I? And what, oh what am I?"  
The truth stood horror-clear:  
I was a stranger to myself; I knew  
Nothing of who I was, nor whence I came,  
Nor to what far, eventual rendezvous  
With life and time I wandered. Like a flame  
That hidden stokers nourish for shrouded ends,  
I burned, and candle-swift I must expire,  
And in the dark that no man comprehends,  
Why guard this flare, this lone, mysterious fire?  
Through what dim weavings, what inscrutable laws,  
What sly mechanics of the world of mind,  
Was I, this blown particular mote, confined  
In this particular body? Was it cause,  
Or causeless chance? Why in this pulsing gown,  
With similar flesh, with texture so akin  
To any man's in any field or town,  
Was this one self, an indivisible whole,  
Captive beneath the skin?  
What cousinship was there between the soul —  
That weightless glow and tumult, walled within —  
And this soft bag of ligaments and cells?  
Might flame and glacier not as fitly wed?  
Thunder and silence, orange bloom and frost?  
How could this feeling essence, where there dwells  
Passion and anguish, wear the vest of lead



Of that dense alien, matter? Fever-tossed  
By this enigma, I could only sigh  
My question to the cold, unanswering stars.  
A prisoner who at last perceives his bars  
And knows the paradox within his being,  
And grasps at Aims and Powers beyond his seeing,  
I ever since have wondered, "What am I?"

## III

There was an earlier day  
When with a drearier, never-silenced note,  
Like a shell shattering, the Mystery smote,  
To wound as only swift bereavement may.  
Under the happy Californian skies,  
And the sun-lighted January oaks  
And sparrows chattering, "All is well, is well!",  
I stood beside a grave with moist young eyes,  
And knew how soon the sod, in miry cloaks,  
Would drop, would sound the knell  
Of her I loved, of her who gave me birth —  
Earth taking back a something more than earth.  
So gay the world, so tender-sweet the green  
Of virgin grass, so mild the morning blue,  
Little in all that soft and breezy scene  
Whispered of one that sank . . . forever sank from view.  
Yet I recalled how only last night I peered  
Upon the wax-pale cheeks, so statue-still,  
And as I gazed in sorrow, startingly felt  
A being gone. That thought was swift and weird  
Yet reassuring: that the flesh, though chill  
And marbled now, was but a vessel drained —  
But where was the nectar it had once contained?  
What trick of change reported the tale that she,  
With the electric animation flowing  
From the warm cheeks, the blue eyes live and glowing,  
Became as ash or stone?



I could not guess, but knew that man must be  
More than the shards of man's mortality,  
More than dead nerve and bone!  
Still but a child, as calendars reckon age,  
I felt the whirring of those mystic pinions  
That none who harken ever quite forget,  
And saw men wandering on a pilgrimage  
Between the dusk of two unmapped dominions  
Strange as the shores where moons of Algol set.  
And was there, in life's trudging climb, an aim  
Beyond the shrivelled moth, the guttered flame? —  
A goal of light vaster than words could name?

## IV

So I would often ask, when in a mood  
Of reverence I watched the sunset sky,  
And felt transported, like a bodiless force,  
Into that gold-red burning solitude.  
And intimations of some tear-deep source  
Of strength and loveliness not born to die,  
Swept me in glory of an organ's pealing,  
And in the grand orchestral tramp and surge  
Of Mozart or Beethoven, harmony  
Like prayers of gods, immortal speech revealing  
Glimpses of nobler worlds, beyond the verge  
Of sensual vision. Was there not a key  
In music, as in rare melodious smiles,  
To splendor stretching, like invisible isles,  
Beneath the sky-line of reality?  
A country nearer than the blaze and sound  
Of halls and motors, and wheel-rutted ground,  
To the high Law that whirls the systems round?

Yes! for the threads of sense  
Melted away like sheaths of mist and foam,  
And on great rhythms of magnificence



One found our spirit-home,  
And all the fumes and placards of the day,  
The beetle business of the street and shop,  
Were less than foam-flecks shimmering on a bay  
Seen from a mountaintop.  
But wonder soared when the soaring notes were heard,  
And love, the soother and solvent of all woes,  
And joy that spirals like the humming-bird;  
Peaked aspiration; and that grief whose throes  
Are not for personal loss, but for the pain  
Of all that drag the body's ball-and-chain;  
And faith that walks on cloud-spires. To what coast  
Of light had those magician measures called,  
What luminous harbor, walled  
Impregably from noontime's iron host?

## V

In other ways, in veiled seductress ways,  
A voice of wonder, music-soft and sweet  
Beyond time's power to cancel or repeat,  
Trembled across my adolescent days.  
Sometimes, on long hill-rambles, arm in arm  
With one who, loitering, smiled into my face  
While deep beneath us slumbering counties spread,  
I felt an incommunicable charm  
That made her presence like a song — a grace  
Not of the fluid eyes, the tilted head,  
Or blonde locks flowing. Captained by the spell  
As by the wizardry of a genie's brewing,  
I seemed, for hallowed intervals, to dwell  
Light-shod among the stars, although pursuing  
The radiant one with only a shadow's wooing.  
Never by lips at all,  
And rarely by warm clasp of twining fingers,  
We sought to pass the wall;  
Yet down the years the fragrance drifts and lingers.



Was it no more than beams  
Of moonlight sorcery,  
Gone like the cherry gleams  
Drained from a sunset sea?  
Only the bubble dreams  
That color and puff and flee?  
Or was it, as our test-tube seers relate,  
The ancestral flame within all breathing kind,  
By which the owl and vulture pick a mate  
And the blind generations breed the blind?  
But if I heard old racial voices speaking  
Out of some dimly branched primordial mesh,  
Why the disguise? and why the spark, the seeking  
As though for light diviner than the flesh?  
Why did not men, even as wolves and hares,  
Mate with no melting words, if love prepares  
For nurslings only? Must the life-power ask  
All the stage furniture? the lilt and glow,  
The witcheries of smile and touch and glance  
That made sad Heloise and Thisbe's woe?  
And but for one rude elemental task?  
Must the ornate pavilions of romance  
Be reared, cloud-brushing, when a hut of clay  
Would serve as well? Or does the reason lie  
In levels deeper than the wise men say,  
In fire that dwells behind the lip and eye?

## VI

On chaparral trails and pavements of cement,  
Still roofed by mists of wonder and confusion,  
I questioned what was firm, and what a tent  
Of rainbows and illusion.  
Sometimes, upon a churchly redwood lane  
Or the shrill boulevard of wheels and crowds,  
A seizure of weirdness burst upon my brain,  
As though these solid sights were less than clouds,



As though the wall-bound hosts,  
The meadows and the mountains and the streams,  
Were only fog or ghosts,  
Were only dreams.

Startling and casual as a lightning thrust  
This feeling flashed, and lightning-swift it died,  
And did it open windows through the crust  
Of life, and fugitively dash aside  
Its scintillant mirages? Could it be  
A rift, a peephole toward the mystery?

Then, in the dreams of sleep,  
Darkly, in ways unsought,  
Sometimes there seemed to leap  
Signals from outlands barred to sight and thought, —  
Wing-shadows of unearthly forms and forces,  
Beings impalpable and lithe as flame,  
Prophecies, portents from deep-barriered sources;  
And a blest exhilaration without name  
When in a twilight shadowy with peace  
I drifted through calm space, like one forsaking  
His bodily prison-cell in glad release.  
Surely, mere specters of the mind's own making,  
Invisible to the scientist's plummet-eye!  
Yet night by night they tantalized with hints  
Of eerie headlands, continents that lie  
Cloud-bound, with pale and other-worldly tints.

But when by day I turned  
To view my nosing, grinding, elbowing race,  
Rarely I saw a trace  
Of wonder sparkling, or of doubt that burned.  
I watched the thousands pant and swirl and swarm,  
Packed in the tramway, hooting down the street;  
Witnessed the weariless feet  
Passing, re-passing; listened to the storm  
Of shouts, like battle screams, in shop and booth,



And heard men jabbering of styles and sales,  
And hordes, dog-famished, snapping dividends.  
But few, though beaten, seemed to doubt their trails  
Were worth the withering journey; age and youth  
Had thought of ways and surfaces, not of ends.  
Yet might the Shining and Elect have traced  
Aims and a Pulse and Reason I had known  
Only by sparks and fragments, if at all?  
Could any life's few nebulous years have shown  
More than a mask of truth, which, myriad-faced,  
Alters with each observer? If the wall  
Could be ripped down by some miraculous force  
That bade me look on many lives, and track  
Their fires, their tides and currents to the source,  
And note their triumphs, and their pain and lack,  
Then might I not at last  
See clefts of radiance through the giant night,  
To tell me why men suffer, love and fight  
Amid the measureless vast?

Even as these questions brushed me in a gale,  
Within my ears a whispering, less than sound,  
Awoke, "See then the various lives unfold  
In widening panoramas, for the tale  
Opens to all who walk the common ground;  
To all who, seeking, hunger to behold  
The light beneath the veil."

Still with these syllables echoing in my mind,  
I peered upon the grappling world again,  
And like a watcher who has long been blind,  
Beheld a twining file of girls and men  
In slow procession; and in each I viewed  
An individual pulse, a special mood,  
And a life-signal each alone pursued.



## PART II

### JACQUELINE GAMBLE

#### I

All glass and granite was the thoroughfare,  
Twelve-tiered above the nudging motor crowd.  
Axles were creaking, nervous horns were loud;  
And over the street a white, wave-rippling glare  
Screamed in fierce letters for the mob to note:  
"Jacqueline Gamble, in *The Price of Sin*."  
I watched the silken multitude file within  
Past the wide doorway's lackey-guarded throat;  
And listened to the hum  
Of hundreds pleasure-hearted,  
While the fleet ushers darted  
Through the gold-lanterned auditorium.

An hour had gone. . . . I heard the explosive crashing  
Of palms that clapped applause, where many a row  
Of faces strained to view a Personage flashing  
Against the footlights' glow.  
Seen from the pit or gallery, here was one  
Gemmed like some fluttering duchess of old France,  
Glamour and beauty sparkling in her glance,  
And round her head a courtly halo spun.  
Yet closely viewed,  
Under the layered make-up, paint and glitter,  
Her magic was a film of guilt; her mood  
Was grim and bitter.  
Small twisting wrinkles, thread-like, edged her lips  
With cynic stitches; her hard eyes, like whips,  
Crackled and snapped; then clouded, thunder-lined,  
Beneath their pencilled flash; the pointed chin  
Turned at a rakish tilt of devil-may-care;



And sadness, like some effluence of her mind,  
 Suffused her even as the acclaiming din  
 Rattled the heavy air.  
 Too well, ironically well she knew  
 Her name, almost with Bernhardt's magnet powers,  
 Would call the parrot populace to woo  
 And waft her kisses and flowers.  
 Too well, with brooding smiles, she recollected  
 How young men tripped rose-laden to her door,  
 And how her scrawls and photographs were collected  
 Like talismans; while many a chirping score  
 Of missives from the moonstruck packed her mail  
 At each engagement. — This to her had long  
 Been the refrain of an often-chanted song,  
 An old, monotonous tale.

Yet what the actual story written deep  
 Under those eyes of live, steel-glinting blue;  
 Under the weathered features; under the sweep  
 Of the dyed hair, the practiced form that flew  
 With a dancer's grace across the boards? What play  
 Never recited for the critics' ears  
 Was acted, with no round of claps or cheers,  
 On some lone stage of laughter or dismay?

## II

Backward, full twenty years  
 I fled; and where a trumpery painted set  
 Made tawdry old Verona's courts and towers,  
 I saw a regal college maid, where showers  
 Of plaudits thundered for her *Juliet*.  
 And in Greek plays hers was the queenly part —  
*Iphigenia* and *Antigone* —  
 And with her creed, "Art for the sake of art!",  
 She feasted on the grand old poetry.  
 And scholarly voices vied



In paeons for the "star,"  
And uncritical critics cried  
She'd travel fast and far.  
And this she never doubted. Stunned by renown,  
Which buzzed about her head in paper praises,  
She floated in glory . . . and not hers to frown  
Upon the honey-sweet and scented phrases.  
Surely, the destinies meant,  
Surely, the planets in their tracks ordained  
She'd climb like Siddons, blaze as Rachel's peer!  
Yes, hers the ridge! her knee would not be bent  
To the miry common road. With art unstained,  
She would intone, for the world's enamoured ear,  
Man's best and noblest.

Such her fond ideal  
When at her back the college gates retreated,  
And she, all laurel-decked and undefeated,  
Went forth to meet the Real.  
Hers was the age-old quest  
Of youth still vision-eyed, of youth that seeks  
The pinnacles of the moon, and holds them close,  
But, tricked by time in some sardonic test,  
Sees the blue ranges, with receding peaks,  
Turn gray and frosty-shouldered and morose.  
Rarely among the children of mankind  
The steady fire, the martyr courage burns  
To keep the dawn-lit monuments enshrined,  
Treasure the Flame, the Wonder and the Light,  
And swear, "I'll not be duped by mock returns,  
But sooner fall, spear-wielding, in the fight!"  
Only the great heroic ones, the few  
Who reap the victories that the ages hail,  
Or grit their teeth, and breast a tyrant gale,  
And perish; only these, the strong and true,  
Can meet the challenge. Jacqueline, like most,  
Tangled amid light webs of compromise

velers

Jacqueline Gamble

21

That slowly wound and thickened, could not boast  
The faith that never dies.  
No straight and simple roadway! but a maze  
Twisted before her; always to her gaze  
The sun she thought so plain was blinking through a haze.

Ambitious as a Caesar, she *must* mount!  
But how? Not pleased with underling parts procured  
First in stock companies of small account,  
And then where Broadway lights and towers allured,  
She saw no way ahead  
To flaunt a Desdemona's fatal grace  
Or stalk as Portia, for her destiny led  
Straight to the marketplace,  
And by the market's dollar-prodded pace  
Her art was measured. She must serve for hire,  
Selling her customers the wares they sought;  
And what they craved was no Promethean fire,  
No stratosphere of thought.  
In comedies whose snickering barroom wit  
Courtied lewd smirks and chuckles, and in roles  
Of hoyden and street-walker she must act,  
And all things luminous and exquisite  
Were crunched like lilies stamped beneath the soles  
Of spiky fact.  
Yet this — oh, surely this was only a phase  
Borne by all artists as they climbed the ladder.  
Bravely she'd lift her head, although her days  
Grew heavier and sadder.  
Who would not slave his hour in basement glooms  
Along the road to ferned, palatial rooms?

But even to secure  
A basement place, how she must weave and scheme!  
Not to the stainless shield, the white and pure,  
The Launfel of the Vision and the Gleam,  
Most often falls the victory in those feuds



Where self-desire and barbed self-enterprise  
Are the twin watchmen of the modern moods.  
With fifty carrion beaks for every prize,  
To twist, to dart, to prey,  
To swoop before the rest,  
Appears the only way  
To conquer in the test.  
By many a flirting smile,  
By many a smirk and bow,  
And many a squirming wile  
Her lips would disavow,  
Subtly she might prevail  
Upon the fires that leapt  
Within the ductile male,  
Till at her knees the Source of Power crept.  
And so she rose from part to gaudier part,  
Frost-glitters in her eyes, and frost upon her heart.

## III

All gifts she flung as counters in that game  
Of bulldog grip-and-grapple; and the loss  
Of young illusion, and of maiden shame,  
Was as the pouring out of dust and dross.  
Many her loves as the window-lamp amours  
Of the night-fluttering fly — many, and vain!  
Yet, in that demi-world of moth-wing lures,  
One passion, laughing scornfully at the brain  
That ordered "No!", ripped open a flaying wound.  
Still in her youth's bright-petalled April season,  
She met Guy Standish — comely as a Keats,  
Poet and draftsman; and some note attuned  
Within the two, some chord abolishing reason,  
Joined them as when, in music and flame, one meets  
A long-lost brother self by marvelous chance.  
She throbbed, she grew, she widened in his sight,  
With such a lift and radiance! such delight

As never glowed in girlhood's dreamed romancel  
Merely to hear him talk  
And see the long, keen, flexible features shine,  
Was joy beyond the mirth of dance and wine;  
To take his arm, and walk  
In silent blending, down the avenue  
Till pearl and saffron glorified the east,  
And feel his presence, tall and kind and true,  
And his firm touch, was something more than feast, —  
It was delirium, and light, and fire,  
Urgency as of lilac airs in spring,  
And bliss, unearthly bliss, as of a flier  
Spiralling on a high, sun-tilted wing.  
Fragrance of meadow green,  
And freshness of the ocean,  
And winds hill-kissed and clean,  
Mixed in a mute emotion . . .  
Till, melted in her love's enveloping arms,  
Almost she could have praised a wood-hut's charms,  
Or sought, content, the pasturelands and farms —  
Almost, and yet not quite! Oh, never quite!

There finally came a day  
She would remember till her breath took flight  
And all remembering failed. He pressed her hand  
In the old, accustomed, coaxing, comradely way,  
And put a question mellow-sweet, and bland  
As his suave presence. Would she fuse her life  
With one who idolized her? . . . Brief his pleas!  
Yes, yes — she'd be wing-footed as his wife,  
And they would merge like master harmonies.  
Then what was this — what had he stunningly said  
While fawn-large kindled eyes bent fondly near?  
"And when we two are wed  
You'll have no reason, Jacqueline my dear,  
For the night-slavery of a stage career."



As though a hornet stung her, back she started  
Out of his clasp, while brutally through her mind  
That sentence, harsh as doom's last raillery, darted:  
"You'll have no reason . . . for a stage career."  
So! was he deaf and blind?  
And were his vows mere wind against the ear?  
Did he not know that with her flesh and soul,  
Her quivering nerves, dreams, hungers, and the whole  
Of ardor, youth, desire, she'd clasped the stage  
In marriage inviolable until she died? . . .  
"But, Jacqueline, why this queer sudden rage?"  
She heard his rolling bass, a half caress  
That made her long to doff her aim, her pride,  
And drown in waves of his warm tenderness.  
Yet no! how could she smash  
Her world to threads and tatters?  
Better a moment's clash  
Than death, than ruin to the All that matters!  
For he *must* know! And would his love not see  
She would not, could not stamp upon her destiny?

But as she argued; as she tried to tell  
The footlights were her being's breath and sun,  
Her throne and altar, not a noose or chain,  
Then like an axe there fell  
Knowledge to crush and stun:  
That each was each, an indivisible one,  
Severed by separate eyes, and pulse, and brain,  
Through whose impregnable walls at most a ray  
Could weakly filter. So, as his voice droned on,  
Some imp within his manner seemed to say  
That he was gone.  
Some stranger wore his clothes; some stranger pleaded  
An actress was a vessel bound to roam,  
But he — he craved a harbor life, and needed  
A hearthfire and a home.  
"Surely, if love be strong enough, the price

Is a puff of air. My dear, the things that count  
Minister to the feelings' deeper fount,  
And yours would be a tinsel sacrifice." —  
So ran his plea, and so the distance grew  
Between them, till he seemed a dwindling form  
Along a darkening tide, and still withdrew  
Into the mist, into the night and storm.

Then, with a passionate clutch  
Of fear she watched him fading, and she flew  
Into his arms, and felt their consoling touch,  
And wept — yes, wept the more because she knew  
That love itself, and the call of life unborn,  
And the years ahead, self-bounded and forlorn,  
Were feeble to sway her. Then he turned, was gone,  
And she still weeping. Yet not mind, nor choice  
Plain as a checker move, had made him go,  
But all the judgments of her yesterdays  
Spoke in one blended voice,  
And from unconscious caverns years below  
Chorused a mandate. . . . So each hour obeys  
The hours gone by, and what we proudly call  
Our will and our decision may be less  
Than ghosts, or shadows fluttering on a wall,  
And he who spurns the lips of happiness  
Will rue its loss, even as Jacqueline  
Would sigh for hers, although if time should pour  
New choices in her lap, they would but glean  
The wind, like those before.

## IV

Renown, the tantalizing god, whose clasp  
Of pearls and poison fondles while it sears,  
Grinned at her elbow, when the simpering years  
Brought "leads," the treasured "leads," into her grasp.  
But no Titania, no Miranda now



Was hers to play; and she but half regretted  
Those luminous roles whose poesy had whetted  
Her fledgling zeal, and lighted a dreamer's grace  
Upon her fledgling brow.  
Enough to hear applause, and bow, and bow,  
While dark lines deepened, tightened on her face.  
Rarely when fortune, gambling in the dark,  
Has shuffled the cards, do men with level eyes  
Candidly note the charges; candidly mark  
The loss and gain, the shallow and the wise;  
But when their life's whole intricate edifice  
Lies crumbling on the brink of an abyss,  
They scorn to look, to heed the precipice.

Thus Jacqueline would seldom peer beneath  
The fustian of her days, but in the fever  
Of work and revelry, she kept a sheath  
Glued to her lids, and played the self-deceiver, —  
Though not completely. Razor-edged and grim  
Her glimpses of the hollowness behind.  
Sometimes, when the rose-petal dawn was dim,  
She'd lie, with throbbing head and haunted mind,  
Couched in the cave-bare room of some hotel  
Upon a tour, and daggered thoughts would rise  
Like lost earth-bowers to one a-dream in hell,  
"Why am I here here? And for what starry prize  
Gesture and pose, to call a leer or smirk  
From some ox-visaged serving-girl or clerk,  
And then pass on, pass on?" Some keener sense  
Cried that applause was but a windy noise  
Around an idol's feet. Its thrills, its joys  
That came, none questioned whence,  
Would vanish like a shout. And time would bring  
New golden calves to glitter where the old  
Were honored, and new peals of praise would ring  
While toppled deities mouldered in the cold.  
Oh, what does worship mean, —

Homage of herds and flocks! —  
When hope's no longer green,  
And sadness mocks?  
Oh, what the claps and cheers  
More than a gibe, a thorn,  
A muttering in the ears,  
When love is gone?  
All boons were hers to claim, except content,  
Since the deep spirit draws no nourishment  
From maunderings of a mob, a clown's ascent.

And these the words that, like an old refrain,  
I heard reverberating in her brain:

“Before the young, enchanted sight  
Of every man and maid,  
Glitters a flying golden light  
On a prised palisade.  
It may entice them with a sword,  
Or lead to orange flowers,  
Snare them to clutch a hempen cord,  
Tempt them to grated towers.  
But will-o'-the-wisp or guardian flame,  
It lures them on to joy or shame.

“A few, within a priestly wood,  
Have seen the beacon shine,  
Till silence wears a nimbused hood,  
And mountains are a shrine.  
And more, where arc-lamps quench the stars  
And hot brick-alleys steam,  
In smoky salons, clattering bars,  
Have craved the flash, the gleam.  
But will-o'-the-wisp or guardian flame,  
It lures them on to joy or shame.



"Many, immured by want, must shun  
That flying golden light.  
Many who seek it lose the sun,  
Circling in bat-like flight.  
And who has ever clutched the ray,  
Or wholly fled its glamour?  
The lives of men are spattering spray  
Where the witch-beams enamour.  
But will-o'-the-wisp or guardian flame,  
It lures them on to joy or shame."

"How fortunate they," I seemed to hear her sighs,  
"Who from the dawn even to set of sun  
Follow no banner but the chosen one,  
And gaze on that with undivided eyes!"  
And as she spoke, strangely I seemed to see  
A seeker lit with less renown than she,  
Kindred in art, but not in destiny.

### PART III

## HARTLEY BRAND

### I

The matted mountain shouldering to the west  
Was houseless, roadless, and immensely steep.  
Under the rock-spires of its chiselled crest  
The canyon pines were dark; and huge the sweep  
Of hilly knobs and round green summits spread  
Far to the sun-warmed distance — glimmering plains,  
Valleys, and cornflower lakes. "Oh, here," I said,  
"Surely some Artist of the silence reigns,  
And surely here an artist would rejoice!"  
And now I saw a cottage some bold choice  
Perched on a tall cliff-elbow, castle-high  
Above a foamy gorge. The brown dirt-road  
Was lost in brown dead grasses, straggling by  
The paint-peeled timbers of that old abode.

Inside, the ancient rooms  
Were stagnant as though time had paused, and slept.  
Deep in the timbered glooms  
Hung paintings, finished with a hand adept  
As many a master's: portraits, not a few;  
Still lifes, but landscapes mostly. Shrewdly captured  
Was the peaked weirdness of the mountain view;  
And moss-green pools where one might pause, enraptured,  
And hear slow water tinkling; forest lawns  
And shadowy-branching oak-woods; wrens and fawns;  
Fountains, and sea-blue jays, and sunsets pure  
In liquid golden over a lustrous land.  
On all I read a common signature,  
The name of Hartley Brand, —



And viewed it also on the paintings packed  
Unframed in closet barrenness, or stacked  
By walls where mildew, like disease, attacked.

Then I beheld the artist — white of head,  
Blue-veined, with paper-fragile visage, pale  
As thistledown; gaunt figure coughing and frail,  
Eyes poet-mild, but all blood-lidded and red,  
And purple-hollowed; while at times the lips  
Wry with unconscious pursings, puckered brows,  
And absently tapping, twitching fingertips  
Hinted not everything inside his house  
Was lovely as the paintings. I could see,  
Ash-gray, and slowed by time, the painter's mate,  
Stitching and stitching by the kerosene lamp,  
Or poking logs beside the blaze-lit grate,  
Or hauling wood or water, wearily  
As in some frontier camp.  
Yet this for years had been  
Merely the day's routine,  
Though patience, wearing thin,  
Sighed for a change of scene.  
A son and daughter, gone  
Far to the marketplace,  
Had left the home forlorn, —  
And time seemed dead and dull, enclosed by dull, dead space.

Far different had the picture been that hope  
Ardently sketched in an April buried now  
By fifty leaf-drifts, when upon a slope  
Aflame with orange poppies he'd watched the sun  
Gilding a mountain brow,  
And knelt, and prayed a silent prayer, "O God,  
Let my loved work, and this alone, be done!  
I care not if the path be long and hard,  
But let me paint, paint, paint,  
To catch on canvas all the fire and light

*Hartley Brand*

And color that my beauty-kindled eyes  
Fathom in clouds and men! Without complaint  
I'll bear all packs, if only before my sight  
This lane of magic lies!"

And he had striven; and wandered forth alone,  
With empty purse but proud and teeming mind  
Into the city's wilderness of stone,  
And, harried and confined,  
Labored by day, but in a school of art  
Offered his nights. There toil and glory blended,  
Free from the torments of the dollar-mart;  
But oftenest glory, robed in starbeams, led,  
For when a master nodded "Good!" or "Splendid!",  
Pillars of pearl and ivory gleamed ahead,  
And there his name was carved, not far below  
The brilliance of Reynolds, Titian and Corot.  
And youth's full-nectared bloom  
Still had not faded when his paintings hung  
Now here, now there, in some exhibit room,  
And critics praised the power of one so young. . . .  
And then it was that destiny, **like a trap**,  
Closed round him, clattering with a steel-jawed might,  
And by the prize delivered in his lap  
Seized him, and bound him tight.

## II

Perhaps had any other chanced his way,  
Fresh as a new-plucked apple, temptingly sweet,  
And fragrant as the wind-blown apple spray,  
She would have charmed his fancy, tripped his feet,  
And led him as far astray.  
But Celia always seemed the Destined One,  
Like an awaited second self, ordained  
Even as the rising of tomorrow's sun.  
Their brief first meeting left him all enchained —



Within an old art shop,  
Pausing to pick some antique curio,  
He saw her waiting, with her wild-witch crop  
Of long straw-yellow hair; warm cheeks whose glow  
Suggested ripening peach-bloom; form as straight  
And slender as a stripling; small peaked nose  
Merrily tilted; and light eyes where fate  
Flashed saucily, or smoldered in repose.  
Ruled by that princess glance,  
He had no will, no reason, no resolve.  
She was desire, and hope, and circumstance,  
Temptation, and fulfillment, and romance,  
And like a satellite he must revolve  
About that central orb. If deep within,  
A frightened messenger warned, "Beware those charms!  
Beware! lest all the spires you toil to win  
Be lost!", the tones were but as far alarms  
Drumming on muffled ears. . . . So they were wed,  
And for a radiant season all was well.  
With giddy heart and head,  
Almost they seemed to tread  
On lily-petals in a rollicking spell.  
Then, with the worries of their daughter's birth,  
They were awakened to the facts of earth.

What if he'd sold some paintings? — two or three!  
The need of bread, like some incurable ache,  
Obsessed him, dogged him; for his dear ones' sake,  
He was no longer free.  
How leave them in their traps of tenement rooms, —  
Ovens in summer, ice-caves half the year,  
Where dust that blew in clouds, and chimney fumes,  
Begrimed the atmosphere?  
Not like a rescuing prince, a Galahad,  
He battled, banner-led and armor-clad,  
But with the sacrifice  
Of dreams, the fabric of the deeper self,

And his an irrecoverable price:  
His brushes dry, his easel on the shelf.  
A twisted smile wrinkling his lips, to screen  
The sore red wound, the never-healing smart,  
He moiled at hybrid tasks — "Commercial art"! —  
And what, he wondered acidly, could it mean  
To bracket Art and Commerce? Just as soon  
Mingle the starlight and the sea's abyss,  
Link the night-shadows to the glare of noon,  
Or wed the oriole's song and viper's hiss!

So, on the wheel of duty,  
Grim as a man waylaid,  
He'd leave the peaks of beauty  
To serve the glooms of trade;  
And all the skill acquired  
To limn the earth and sky,  
Must now be chained, be hired  
To make men bid and buy.  
True! he could paint at casual times, — he could,  
If he'd forget the squalling babe, and her  
Whose comradeship was still a luminous good;  
And if the day's hot labors did not blur  
His mind, and slow his fingers. Yet in art,  
Where competition, like a pounding horde,  
Clangs at the door, and practice trains and teaches,  
He who can pour his powers only in part  
Into the battle, swings a blunted sword,  
And wears a coat of mail with many breaches.

## III

Ten years went past, ten dusty, dragging years,  
That led to Middle Age's salt frontiers.  
He watched old friends, whose puff-of-flame careers  
Blazed into brilliance; while, no closer yet  
To the white pinnacles of youth's desire,



He still must plod and sweat.  
"Ah, if I had the means," he loved to say,  
"To burst these city manacles; retire  
To some calm hut, miles from the beaten way,  
Where, tagged by no restraint,  
I need but trail my star, and sketch and paint,  
Then, then I would inscribe my name in fire!"  
And life, as though with some satiric whim  
That put his faith, his courage to the test,  
Flung an unlooked-for gift, and offered him  
The prize of his request.

Far, far away, amid a western wild  
Of timberlands and mountains, there was one,  
A cousin, who had died without a child,  
And cherished Hartley almost as a son,  
And loved his paintings too, and understood  
The long, rock-riven road an artist dares.  
And so his house, deep in the western wood,  
And some small revenues — some scattered shares  
Of stock, and lesser wealth — were tossed by will  
At Hartley. . . . Never could he quite be sure  
Whether the news arrived with more of thrill  
Or terror, for it brought a goad, a lure,  
A challenge and a threat. His was the lot  
Of one who bawls and clamors for the moon,  
At last to gain his end, and find it not  
The hoped-for boon.  
And his the fate of the dreamer on whose gaze  
A two-edged sword is flashing, "Come! Decide!"  
No more to mope, mope in a moody haze,  
But make a choice by which he must abide  
Perhaps forever! Well did Hartley know  
The town, which he detested like a scourge,  
Swelled with the waves of art, whose throb and flow  
Were an ever-present urge  
To striving. Hidden from their tidal beat,

Though with a brush, and bread enough to eat,  
Would he not sink in quicksands of defeat?

But no! with failure marked  
On city dust, on pavement stones and walls,  
Now it was time he acted, and embarked  
Where mountains, and the stern, wise forest halls  
Gave inspiration. In a year or two  
His genius would regain its soul, and make  
Such paintings, so assured and rich and true,  
That he would rocket back to town, and take  
The world by one assault. So he believed,  
Or half believed, while still some skeptic voice,  
Faint-muffled, would not let him be deceived  
In soberer moments. Yet he made his choice:  
"In art's high consecration, I'll withdraw!  
Artists must toil alone — such is the law!";  
And tried to think it nothing when he saw  
The tears on Celia's cheeks.

IV

And so he went  
Far from the bubbling city to the home  
Beneath the stars, among the rocks and pines,  
Like one who keeps a fateful sacrament.  
And from the crags, the blue cathedral dome  
Of heaven, and green-columned forest lines,  
He drank a light, a wonder,  
A windy-blowing grace;  
And in the clouds, the thunder,  
And winter's glistening lace,  
And in the sleet-gale flying,  
In mountain flowers and frost,  
He found new themes, supplying  
Charm he could not exhaust.  
And never had he painted half so well



As in those goaded years; but never now  
His paintings hung for critic eyes to see.  
The town-pent dealers could not catch the spell  
Of the nude ice-peak, and the misty brow  
Of glaciers, and the black opacity  
Of cedar pools. Nor could he reach their doors,  
For his small wealth had shrunken, and his mite  
Barely could give his loved ones flour and meat;  
And, like a man marooned on portless shores,  
He could not, though he strained and prayed, take flight  
Even for a visit, from his cliff-retreat.

And years went darkly by  
Till age, the squeezing python, slithered close,  
And hope, the mocking-bird, began to die.  
And, though at times sour-tempered and morose,  
He painted still — what else, while hands were left,  
Remained to do? But little enough it mattered  
Whether his touch were tyro-crude or deft,  
For he whose spur is lead, whose world is shattered,  
Will work dull-mannered, like a slow machine.  
More futile than a bout of solitaire,  
More futile than to dye young grasses green,  
More futile than orations to the air,  
Were all his labors now. Oh, never claim  
The artist only toils to ease his soul  
Of doubt, of anguish! Who would light a flame  
That lends no warmth? pave highways for the feet  
Of phantom armies? grapple for a toll  
Of spray and bubbles? Work that could compete  
In power and skill with Angelo himself  
Yet lies, dust-gathering, upon a shelf,  
May be no more than any tintless blur.

Yet often reconciling thoughts would stir;  
And though old visions, even as youth, were dead,  
This voice would fill the worn, sad painter's head:

Travelers

"What matter to the flamelit sky,  
What matter to the clouds and peaks,  
If one small sufferer pant and die,  
And lose the lamp he seeks?  
What matter to the living streams,  
The precipice with purple seams  
Round which the morning fog-brew steams,  
Or the windy wood that creaks?

"What matter to the jackal crowd,  
Nose down in counting-house or bar?  
What matter to the grapplers loud  
In every gilt bazaar?  
Neither the banker in his den,  
The soldier of the sword or pen,  
Nor all the mole-eyed ranks of men  
Will note one tumbling star!

"And they whose surface-ranging eyes  
Pick false from true, and bad from best,  
What matter if with glossy lies  
They choose the damned or blest?  
To strive one's fullest — that is all!  
And though we mount the ridge, or fall,  
Still we have scaled the hardest wall,  
And met the sternest test!"

Yet sometimes Hartley, pacing unresigned,  
Would cry, "Oh, for some task to bury me  
Deep in the flux and stir of humankind!  
I envy those who put the Dream behind,  
And wisely labor for a place or feel!"  
And hearing this grave plaint, I turned to one  
Round whom a darker, dingier web was spun;  
Who fought for all that Hartley used to shun.



## PART IV

### RALPH HARDINGTON

#### I

Facing a walnut desk, there sat in state  
A fox-slim figure, whose lean nose was bent  
Low like a hound's to trail a passing scent;  
His eyes, half closed, twin little disks of slate  
With wrinkling screwed-up lids, at times would flash  
Irascibly; his niggard hair was gray  
Beneath the bald high pate; bloodless as ash  
His features; and his voice had a whip's way  
Of snapping out, and crackling back. His hands,  
Hooked like a hawk's, clutched with a fondling air  
At emptiness; his nods were dire commands  
To the gaunt vassals round his swivel chair,  
And a lip-reverence met him everywhere.  
And stock reports and letters heaped before him,  
Buzzers that whizzed, and ever-clanging bells,  
And messengers that panted in, and bore him  
The hour's dispatches; and the glassed-off cells  
Vibrant with click of keys, and polished aisles  
Where drooping drudges, pale and nag-eyed, pored  
Over long inked accounts and crowded files,  
Bespoke the empire of a prince and lord.

Surely, no *Coeur de Lion* with a ring  
Of halberd-clanking knights, had blades to match  
This crownless and uncoronated king,  
This champion in the wars of seize-and-snatch.  
No vapory domes and towers,  
No castles in Cathay  
But near and ductile powers

Were his to sway.  
A sovereign realm was shaped to his desire, —  
Envy of slaves and pride of financiers,  
And sculptor of careers,  
The brokerage firm of Hardington and Squire.  
And his a generalship for those high ends  
Of stocks and bonds, margins and dividends,  
By which the modern Bonaparte ascends.  
Implacable as the weather, his control  
Of money, the dream that binds the world, could make  
The mulish crowd wear harness for his sake,  
And mountains bleed, and deserts flow with toll.  
His was the staff of credit — Merlin's rod  
To which, as to a god,  
Nations bent low; while he that swung the lever  
Might shine, shine high above the good and clever.

## II

Not always had he strode as potentate  
On ramparts of finance. . . . The picture leapt  
Back to a greener date,  
Back to a crisis forty years before,  
When, downy-cheeked, fresh from a roadside store,  
He sought Manhattan's labyrinths, and slept  
On benches, and on warehouse bales and sacks,  
And fed on crusts and crackers; then, in time,  
With bleeding palms, by bulldog-firm attacks,  
Launched his precipitous climb.  
Callow and soft he looked as many a youth  
Who, village reared, is yet not meanly bred, —  
Shambling and awkward, and a bit uncouth,  
Yet with sound maxims tinkling in his head:  
That man should always seek  
To help his needy kin,  
Succor the poor and weak  
And shun the hooks of sin,



And be as virtuous as a palladin.  
With almost a puppy's clear-eyed innocence  
Lighting his schoolboy face, he gave no clue  
To the bold steel beneath; by diligence,  
Warm diligence and faith he hoped to woo  
The impartial judge, Success.

But not for long  
A fog in the eyes would dupe him; soon he toiled,  
A clerk, where the stock-market's sizzling throng  
Sputtered and boiled,  
And with apt sight he saw that here was rage  
Passing the fury of leopards in a den,  
Where teeth lashed out, and men were clawed by men,  
And talons and fangs were masters of the stage.  
The only succor that the weak could find  
Was to be swallowed whole; the only sin,  
To be devoured; the only way to win,  
To suck live blood, and topple those behind.  
Virtue? — the slash-and-tear of gulping jaws!  
Vice? — Coils of conscience that would trip the feet!  
Each for himself — no quarter! — such the laws  
That served the sharp and fleet.

Subtly, like some insidious boring worm,  
Not in a week or month, these precepts grew.  
Stumbling and dazed, then doubtful for a term,  
He rubbed his eyes, but could not blot from view  
Those wild wolves snapping in a brick-walled lair;  
And foraging wolf-like, grappled for his share  
Of the red haunch of wealth; and, strangely, found  
No pillar of lightning felled him to the ground,  
No waters crushed him when his plighted word  
Was less than smoke, than cinders blown in air.  
Honor, the sedative, might soothe the herd  
To wind themselves in chains,  
While men of power and brains

Fruitfully sheared them. . . . Thus from deal to deal,  
Risking no platter of his own, but means  
Borrowed or filched, he skulked behind the scenes  
For profit, but was vigilant not to steal  
(Not when the law was on his neighbor's side),  
And never broke a contract, nor revealed  
A secret tip, nor sold a watered stock,  
Nor put the heads of friends upon the block  
(Not when he had no statutory shield).  
So, in the small concern  
That with a gambler's passion he began,  
There were huge fatty dividends to earn  
If, circumspect of plan,  
One let no scruple mar a swift return.

## III

Not that he ever consciously picked the wrong!  
No, no! By some dark quirk of self-defense  
He built a fortress out of waxed pretense  
That moulded his deeds as admirable and strong.  
Deeming himself endowed  
With genius that the floundering millions sought,  
He felt more puffed and proud  
Than nettled by compunctions, when he bought  
The votes of legislators, when he oiled  
The palms of judges, or with buttery doles  
Schooled his own candidates. And when he toiled  
In burrows subterranean as a mole's,  
To win the hand of her whose name and place  
Would open locks to gilt-edged revenues,  
He was not halted by her want of grace,  
Nor did he groan like one with worlds to lose  
Seeing Matilda's hen-like countenance,  
Her pecking querulous eyes, her smirks and sneers.  
What if there was a beak within her glance?  
What if her voice, a cackling in the ears,



Rasped like a rusty axle? Such a buy  
Could not be reckoned by its looks or sound  
(Not when the steel mills' lucrative black ground,  
Ruled by her father, smudged a county's sky).  
Truly, in wooing such a high connection  
One must not stare with chilling circumspection  
Upon mere features, character or complexion.

Still, there was one small trick that jester life  
Had played upon him. Not a month before  
He won Matilda Langley as his wife,  
His eyes met Claire's; and like a gale that bore  
Upon him with a clamoring and a roar  
And almost blew him over, was the joy  
And amazement of her presence. April-bright,  
And natural-mannered as a country boy,  
And friendly as a song, she brought a light  
And music that his granite path had lacked,  
And, whisking the dust of offices from sight,  
Became an antidote against stone Fact.  
Thus once in all his days  
A lyric glory spoke.  
Out of his lips her praise  
In pleading eloquence broke . . .  
Till suddenly, chilled and shaking, he awoke,  
And knew it but a brief, impossible phase.  
What! wed his secretary? — One so poor  
She was herself the solitary lure  
And brought him nothing else — no friends, no kin  
To grease the grade before him? . . . Many a time  
On some worn midnight of an afteryear,  
When the round leering moon looked weirdly in  
Over the steeples and the towered grime,  
Some chord within the brooding financier  
Would feel a tug, and to his memory  
A face would rise, and clear gay eyes would beam, —  
Ghosts of the past, the nevermore-to-be, —

Phantasms of a dream!  
Figments the visionless day would exorcise,  
But never the telltale night. And he would wince  
To think of one who lay  
Less than a room away;  
To picture the taloned clutch and barnyard eyes  
Of her whom he had honored, ages since,  
As sharer in his life.

Yet by her aid  
He had been studded like a duke, and rose  
To snap a whip-lash at the heels of trade.  
Neat-tailored as a courtier's were his clothes,  
His dinners sumptuous as a Czar could seek,  
And in soft-lanterned lounges, lavishly hung  
With tapestries and paintings, he could rest,  
And round his altar honeyed lips would speak,  
And worshippers fawn and dance, and old and young  
Bow down, since he who serves himself the best  
Often is most revered.

Why was it then,  
Despite the lacquered chests and limousines,  
Despite trim servants in a liveried corps,  
Despite fair ogling dames and emulous men,  
Despite a yacht and Florida home, and means  
To sail, silk-pillowed, to the remotest shore,  
Sometimes the things he touched  
Seemed only puffs of air,  
As though he sank, and clutched  
A spectral stair?  
Sometimes he felt as though  
He skirted a reeling void,  
And, lost in the pit below,  
Must be destroyed?  
Emptiness gaped beyond the pomp and strut,  
Emptiness nudged the salon busts and chairs,



Emptiness filled the staid directors' room  
Where gray-heads dickered when the doors were shut;  
Emptiness yawned on the wheel-packed thoroughfares,  
And he saw an emptiness, still greater, loom,  
The demon-guarded emptiness of the tomb,  
Close on his pathway.

Now, with panic actions,  
Like a trapped rat when inescapable fate  
Snarls terrier-jawed, he grappled for distractions,  
And with a blare and flourish would donate  
To churches, hospitals and schools; endow  
Foundations paid to keep his name alive  
When he was gone. And yet no matter how  
In gasping frenzy he struggled to survive,  
He could not numb the sense  
Of nothingness, doom-certain to arrive  
And rob him of power, fame and opulence.  
Nor could he, poorer than a peasant, find  
The simple nectar of content, nor slay  
The mocking doubt, the hollowness that lay  
Above, before, behind.  
And so he toiled, toiled on like one who strains  
Merely to keep from seeing his own chains,  
And the Black Charioteer who pulls the reins.

And as he worked, I heard the thoughts that burst  
As from the wounded heart of one accursed:

"Behold me, you who smile and smirk, and you who prink and  
fawn!

In me you view the modern age, its fruit, its flower, its spawn!  
The ship that sails without a port, the night without a dawn!

"In me the lamp without a wick, the fire despoiled of air,  
The trout without a swimming-place, the fox without a lair,  
The water balked behind a dam, the cloud-hid rocket flare.

"In me the brooding thunder bank, the lightning's maniac fist,  
The palmy-green mirage that calls, then passes in a mist,  
The storm-gale and the night that make a window-rattling  
tryst.

"In me the stripped and swinging limb, the mill-town's tarry  
sky —  
All meaningless, and dusty vain; and none to question why.  
All meaningless, and dusty vain! — and so, alas! am I!"

And as this lamentation left his lips  
I heard him mutter, "How I envy those  
Whose destinies are dimmed by no eclipse  
Of practical routine, of fact and prose, —  
Men who, unchained as light, may wander far  
To follow a lonely lamp or trail a star!"

Even as he voiced this wish, I looked on one  
As little kindred to Ralph Hardington  
As bees are like a wolf, or rivers like the sun.



## PART V

### CHRISTOPHER RALSTON

#### I

Above his native village  
The mountains to the east  
Were long and craggy-headed  
And intricately creased.  
And what might lie beyond them,  
What sea-blue lakes and plains?  
Oh, for the wings of swallows  
To cruise those charmed domains!

Below his native village  
The ocean of the west  
Foamed to the bright Forever  
With jade or slaty breast.  
And what might lie beyond it,  
What peacock shoals and sands?  
Oh, for a sail to voyage  
Forth to those castled lands!

So might the chronicler have sung of him  
Reared where the bald coast-ranges and the sea  
Were like Aladdin doorways to the rim  
Of light and splendor and immensity.  
Always, since first his infant eyes had known  
Those twin horizons of the waves and ridges,  
His gypsying fancy had been building bridges  
Across the distance to some scarlet throne,  
Some Cyclops cave, or Circe wonder-zone.  
Sometimes, with almost a lover's wistful gaze,  
He watched a mast that dwindled slowly, slowly,

Far in the fire-tipped deep, then vanished wholly  
Into the sunset haze.  
And often, when a traveler passed, with skin  
Of sunburnt copper, and lean nomad face,  
He listened shining-visaged, drinking in  
The tales of many a magic-carpet place,  
Stories of opal halls,  
Of elephants on parade,  
Of streams with thunder-falls,  
And pagodas pearl-inlaid,  
Of palm lagoons, and isles  
With rush-clad fighting men,  
Of the jungle's orchid miles,  
And the growling tiger-fen.  
And how he panted for those gem-girt shores,  
And feasted on all volumes he could seize  
On lands of Buddhas and the jasmine breeze,  
And vowed that sometime he would bend his oars  
To the blest Antipodes!

There came a summer — he was just sixteen —  
When, stealing off with scarcely a backward stare,  
He tried to cast from mind the tearful scene  
His mother made, his father's white-hot flare  
Of warning: "Son, go from us, if you dare!  
But when your moon-mad dizzying flight is through,  
Sail back again across the waste salt foam,  
And you will hug our knees, and know it true  
The only gold lies at the gates of home!"  
But even the sight of the gray old countenance  
Crisscrossed with scrawlings of life's trial and woe,  
Gave him no pause; he sighed, but had to go,  
And, siren-haunted still by dreamed romance,  
Shipped at the nearest port  
On a tramp steamer, like a midget caught  
Within a monster net.



## II

The years reached out,  
Flashing a spectrum many-hued and strange,  
He climbed Peru's snow-bonneted southern range;  
And where an arrowhead volcano curled  
Its faint smoke-banners from a cindery spout  
In Guatemalan skies, he followed trails  
To ruined palaces of a jungle world.  
He battled lunatic gales  
Running amok in the green Celebes;  
And stood on coral sands  
Where cocoanut palms, above the sailless sea,  
Waved giant-fronded hands  
To bid him stay, and yearn and seek no more.  
He saw the white-robed lamas of Tibet,  
And threaded the twisted alleys of Lahore  
Amid the turbaned rabble; dared the threat  
Of the knifed tribesmen of Afghanistan  
Where gorges of the Hindu Kush spread deep;  
Thirsted across the Gobi's dust-blown sweep;  
And, under a stainless sky,  
Viewed the enamelled mosques of Ispahan;  
And watched the buzzards fly  
Over the thatch of squalid roofs that stared  
On Caribbean brine. Far and away,  
From Nome to Perth, from Narvik to Bombay,  
Restlessly, like an ocean bird, he fared.  
Sometimes he earned a crust  
By heaving and sweating in the stoker's hole  
Of some foul steamer — blistered, black with coal,  
And bloody-lidded; sometimes, in disgust,  
Forsook the vessel on a teeming coast  
Of colored booths and faces; sometimes gave  
His days to traders at a slumberous post  
Of spice and copra; sometimes, blindly brave,  
Fought in a border feud,

Shouldered a rifle for some mountain state,  
Or for some gold-plumed swarthy potentate  
Went lion-hunting — ceaselessly imbued  
With lust for action. So, from year to year,  
Drunk with adventure as a buccaneer,  
He combed the byways of this various sphere.

And much he found to charm the mind and eyes,  
And much to start the pulses beating fast.  
The sea, the desert and the Alpine vast  
Allured like paradise.  
And yet — and yet, for all the life and glow,  
The quaintness and the wonder and delight  
Of towered cities by the twining Po,  
Or lone woods snowy in Alaskan night,  
What satyr made it seem  
No proffered spectacle, however grand,  
Equalled the hope, the dream  
That drew him tirelessly from land to land?  
Why did he always meet  
A sadness of loss with each horizon gained,  
And find the glory of all vistas waned  
At his approaching feet?  
And why, with each fresh disenchanting stroke,  
Did his insatiable spirit but invoke  
New gods and shores; exclaim, "Advance! Advance!";  
Put forth again; and wear another yoke?

## III

At times — at fleeting times — seductive arms  
Opened to bid his treadmill hurry cease.  
Once, in a land of fruit and pastoral farms,  
Where autumn-browed hill-orchards murmured, "Peace!",  
He paused, and, fever-weakened, passed his days  
Couched in a piny cottage in a wood;  
And one of mercy's world-wide sisterhood,  
A bloom-cheeked girl with laughing heart and ways,



Bent over him, and nursed him; and it seemed  
He woke in some divine Hesperian west  
When those blue eyes, whose smile was music, beamed  
With fondness half confessed.  
Then, as he watched her; watched the light that made  
A symphony of feeling on her face,  
Blushing dawn-crimson, or subdued in shade,  
But oftenest with a pale peach-petal grace,  
He hungered to stay, to leave her side no more.  
Here was the crowned adventure! here romance  
He long had panted for!  
So, convalescent still, he courted her,  
And read the love-note in her speaking glance,  
And planned their years together, where the spur  
Of an oak-tangled hill began to rise,  
Upon a farm that, with stout enterprise,  
He hoped to buy.

But not for long the spell  
Possessed him; when he walked the fields anew,  
With cheeks wind-tingled, feeling whole and well;  
And when he watched the fleet wild-geese that flew  
In wavering wedges south along the blue,  
Then with a prod and sting  
The rover spirit woke.  
A gull without a wing,  
Or a wheel without a spoke,  
Would be as much in place  
As he, clamped down within a tight embrace  
And barricaded from the vasts of space!

Long afterwards, upon some dun plateau  
Rimmed by far mountain prongs and hatchet beaks,  
Or in a lichened land of rock and snow,  
Or where rice-marshes or cane-bordered creeks  
Steamed under oven skies, he would recall  
His wild last moments with the maid: her fingers

Caught in his own; her features trenched by pain,  
Although the frozen tears forgot to fall;  
And her spasmodic lips that pled, "Remain!"  
But memory, the twining ghost that lingers  
When sorrow's self is dead, would not be slain  
Even with the mounting seasons; still he bore  
The clutch of those warm hands from shore to shore,  
The hurt eyes that accused, "No more! You'll come no more!"

## IV

And on and on he strayed; and one alone  
Of all the lands pressed by his vagrant feet  
Was marked, "Taboo!" — a walled, forbidden zone.  
For twenty hurrying years he would repeat  
The promise, "I'll go drifting yet — some day —  
Homeward, to settle!" Yet almost as though  
In terror of some old, implacable foe  
That, with sly laws, might sentence him to stay,  
Never until his fortieth birthday came  
Did he take passage for the taunting spot.  
Then half reluctantly, and half aflame,  
He reached a port he never had forgot,  
Where as a bright-eyed lad, whole lives ago,  
He had espoused adventure. Now he sped  
Back to the town between the peaks and sea,  
To wander like a shadow from below.  
Mother and father — both, long since, were dead;  
Kindred were staring strangers. Two or three,  
Chums of his childhood, mates of early youth,  
Looked on amazed, and offered doubtful hands  
To this lean jacketed traveler, so uncouth  
With bronzed and tattooed skin and bearded lips,  
And smoldering crater eyes, and talk of strands  
Tinted like sunset, jeweled pyres, and ships.  
Then, with a voiceless ache,  
He knew his early home no home at all.



He was the free wild drake  
Returned to languish by the barnyard wall.  
And more remote were all his boyhood friends  
Than shamans drumming at the planet's ends,  
Or flowered girls where the atoll beach extends.

And so the migrant bird  
Took flight again, to flutter home no more;  
And few the crests remaining to explore,  
And long, with sinuous descents, the track  
Looping before him to the sands of age;  
While always, dogged by some elusive lack  
And trick desire that coaxed him onward still  
Like one who trails a vanished heritage,  
He ventured forth, less by deliberate will  
Than by some iron law within his being  
That made his spirit, baffled and unseeing,  
Covet the very goal his feet were fleeing.

And as he roved some ridge's hemlock rim,  
Or cobalt sea, or scarred volcano's brim,  
This was the low complaint I heard from him:

"Within my heart a tyrant reigns,  
Stern as a ring of sabred foes.  
Often the seeming free are those  
Tangled in ropes or chains.  
For, though I wander east or west,  
Or voyage south, or voyage north,  
I cannot flee that scourging guest.  
The tyrant throned within my breast  
Will drive me forth, will drive me forth!

"The earth that serves the magnet sun,  
The oak-tree rooted in the grove,  
Are less enslaved than I, who rove  
And serve not anyone.

To trail mist-streamers down the night,  
Forever round, and round, and round.  
And in the deeps, and in the height,  
Gray pits, and morning fields of light,  
My guerdon is the never-found!"

"And oh," he cried, "the stinging and the pang  
Of that adventure which can never cease!  
I envy those, the pensioners of peace,  
For whom no siren voices ever sang.  
Oh, for the home-routine, the lowly task, —  
Familiar yards and porches, lives that bask  
In neighborly smiles!" . . . And as he spoke, I turned  
To one for whom no weird horizons burned,  
Safe in those walls the wanderer's gaze had spurned.



## PART VI

### LORETTA WOOD

#### I

Not large nor small, with neither wildflower grace  
Nor the brick city's canyon steam and roar,  
The town of Burroughs held a middle place  
Among the settlements of the eastern shore.  
And they who walked amid its elm-girt rows  
Of even, double-storied, case-like homes,  
Clung to their middle standing; few of those  
Who lived in Burroughs sighed for Alps or Romes.  
Not poor nor rich nor proud,  
Not eloquent nor keen,  
Not too subdued nor loud,  
Not generous nor mean,  
Fearful of alien thought  
And rutted in old ways  
Of things they sold and bought,  
And worship of what pays,  
The folk of Burroughs, in their patterned streets,  
Trim churches, and decorous shops and clubs,  
Had cheers for middle aims, and middle feats,  
And froze diverging ones with sneers and snubs.

There was a house brown-painted, slightly frayed  
Like all its sisters in a ten-block line,  
Where age had scarcely eased the stern design,  
But burdened all with heaviness and shade;  
And in its chambers, scrubbed and stuffed and shuttered,  
Whose stagnant air but seldom stirred the dust  
Of cracking ancient leather chairs that cluttered  
The carpeted floors, smelling of time and must,

I peered on one who swung the mop and broom  
With drudging strokes in hall and dining-room;  
And saw the wild-bird eyes  
That strangely peeped out of the wrinkled face  
As from an old disguise, —  
The features craggy and worn, where some dead grace  
Lurked like a phantom. Cobweb-gray her head,  
And gray the look her sagging countenance bore,  
And like a wispy thread  
Her bending figure tottered from door to door,  
Nearer to ghost than woman. Yet that fire  
Half banked within her eyes, as of desire  
Baffled but still reluctant to expire,  
Stung me, and held me.

## II

Backward now I stared  
Over the twisting seasons, to behold  
The same old house, but hardly half so old,  
And there, in rooms more brightly decked and aired,  
Loretta Wood was smiling — sprightly-eyed,  
Eager to action as a well-coiled spring,  
Wistfully gazing under the bunched high ring  
Of pallid-golden curls, with lids drawn wide  
In wonder at the world of seventeen;  
And bud-lips trembling. Not a symmetry  
Of flesh and contour, like a storied queen,  
Dazzled the watcher; though I seemed to see  
A charm, a radiance shining,  
A feeling, fluctuant force,  
A light above defining  
From some unsounded source,  
A glow beyond the April flowers of beauty,  
Whose petals waste on every wind of May.  
Yet in her path the ashen monster, Duty,  
A clawed devourer, lay.



I saw her mother, Sally, drab of dress,  
Wry as a shrivelled apple partly turned  
To vinegar; I saw those quarreling three,  
Her younger sisters, Beatrice, Sue and Bess;  
And brother William; saw the feuds that churned  
Their hours together like a gale-whipped sea.  
But most Loretta, charged in a mass attack,  
Was scolded, railed against, and beaten back,  
For she strayed furthest from the roped-off track.  
She would converse with gypsies; take the arm  
Of some loud colored girl, whose rickety home  
Leaned bald and paintless where the trains roared by;  
And often, on some dusty road or farm,  
She'd stoop to watch the laboring ants, or comb  
A patch of weeds for blossoms small and shy  
To press and carefully save. Yet, queerer still,  
A most unmaidenly longing seized her will,  
And left her demon-driven. She had viewed  
How migrant families, many-membered, dwelt  
Beyond the rails, on the nether side of town,  
In hovels, leaky-roofed and warped and rude;  
And seen how hollowing disease had dealt  
Raw wounds, and struck the pinch-necked women down,  
And slain the children. So her goal was clear:  
To learn the craft of healing; give her life  
At the great selfless shrine of medicine,  
And, consecrated to this high career,  
With magic serums and the cleansing knife,  
Aid the limb-torn and fever-sucked to win  
Quieter, fairer days.

But had she sought  
To wed a cannibal, or beat a gong  
On some palm-isle where javelined tribesmen fought,  
She hardly would have seemed more wildly wrong  
To those she called her kindred. Trim and pure  
In their remote backwater, they were sure

The world was masculine, and woman's place  
Was to be coy of lip and sweet of face,  
And yielding and secure.  
And that a daughter of their clan should dare  
Reach for the white physician's robe — as soon  
Let Niles or Mississippi flow in air,  
Or the sun obey the moon!

Yet sturdily she argued. What! she asked,  
Then had the healing art a sex? To him  
Whose festering malady had been unmasked  
And cured, what difference if the mended limb  
Were saved by man or woman? . . . So the feud  
Raged on, and still she might have won her end;  
She coaxed her father, begged him to intrude,  
And be her succoring friend;  
And he, more pliant, subtler than his mate,  
More richly schooled by time, more reconciled  
To pranks of this enchanting girl whom fate  
Had made his child,  
Finally might have yielded . . . had the brush  
Of fortune not erased him from the scene  
One winter night when she, not quite eighteen,  
Knew from the nurses' solemn tread, the hush  
In the dark room where he, stone-silent, lay,  
That all but tears was over.

### III

By that day

All after-time was marked. Loretta now  
Saw her spring gardens withering, turning bare.  
As soon pluck cherries from a sapless bough  
As visions from despair!  
Sourly puckered, with slow-swinging jaw  
And yellow teeth that nervously chewed her lips,  
The mother's face spoke menace; sharp as whips  
Her words, that left the daughter bleeding and raw:



"What! still repeat this nonsense? Can't you see  
Such whims are luxuries — which we can't afford!  
We've barely enough by scraping, thank the Lord!  
To fight off poverty.  
So down on your knees, you ingrate! I'd have thought  
You'd alter, after those mad notions brought  
Your father to his grave!"

Amid her tears,  
Knowing the gentle face of him who died,  
The indulgent looks, and smile of fatherly pride,  
She heard some bodiless voice din in her ears  
That cruel charge had lied.  
But he could come no more, nor soothe her grief  
With laughter, and the friendliness of his hands  
Clasping her shoulders; nowhere gleamed relief  
From duties sucking her with blood-demands.  
She dreamt of flight — but how? and where to go?  
Who would lend aid or shelter? who bestow  
A word of courage? . . . All the while, through ties  
Suppler than ropes or chains, the mother spun.  
With countenance tightly shawled, and fountain eyes,  
Sometimes she'd look reproach at the villain sun  
For shining too hotly; sometimes would complain  
Of aching bones, or crazily reeling head;  
Or with a forked and shooting visceral pain  
Would take to bed.  
And though the doctors, pondering, found no clue  
To any weakness that their art could touch,  
Her martyr mien befitted one who knew  
She hobbled, needing a crutch;  
And when Loretta, wrenched by compromise,  
Buried her old ambition, half resigned,  
Yet prayed somehow for service as a nurse,  
Sally, who thanklessly took the sacrifice,  
Sighed, and exclaimed, "Best succor your own kind!";  
And, sinking down, grew worse and steadily worse.

And thus began the sickroom servitude,  
In part devotion, and in part routine,  
Part blood-allegiance, part a hopeless mood  
Of waiting, waiting. Thus she slipped between  
Two slowly tightening vise-jaws. One whole year,  
A nursemaid stooped at many a dismal chore —  
Making the bed, or bringing the medicine tray,  
Or with the toast to brown or tea to pour —  
Scarcely she dared to think of her career,  
A golden summit hid in trailing gray  
Of mist-banks far away.  
And like one banished to some dank bat-cave,  
Who, meshed and barriered, half forgets the light  
Of sun and moon, she struggled to be brave  
And fold her wings — yet could not fold them quite . . .  
Till all at once, open and rocket-bright,  
The wide good world was calling.

## IV

By some ruse

Of double-dealing fortune, Michael Hyde  
Was summoned by Sally. All the year she'd tried  
Doctor on doctor, only to abuse  
This healer's methods, that one's lack of skill.  
And after Michael, fresh from college, came  
And posted his placard, she, though grumbling still,  
Brightened a bit, and hastened to exclaim,  
"I'll try the bungler!"

When he rang the bell,  
Loretta answered; and she felt a flame  
Shoot through her, and her bosom oddly swell,  
To see this blond, bull-shouldered giant standing  
Before her gravely, with a small black case.  
His manner, suave — and yet, she thought, commanding —  
Charmed her; and on his strong, high-templed face  
A faint smile flickered as she led him in.



But why her fluttering heart, the tingling rush  
Of pleasure at his emptiest nod or grin?  
"Your mother needs me?" What should make her blush  
At this impersonal question? . . . "Yes, this way,"  
Was all that she could say.  
But later, when the sickroom call was through,  
He asked to see her. She beheld the mirth  
That brimmed his large round eyes of gentian blue.  
"About your mother — just a word," he said.  
"What's wrong with her? Why, not a thing on earth,  
Other than fumes dark-circling through her head  
That make her fear (and almost prize her dread)  
For her own life. She looked a bit displeased  
When I could find no symptoms for despair."

Loretta smiled; she liked his candid air.  
Then suddenly a vehement impulse seized  
Her tongue; exuberantly, on a burst  
Of hot, spontaneous feeling, she expressed  
More than to any friend: her dreams; her thirst  
For service, long repressed;  
The hollowness of her days. "You only tell  
The crying truth. For it is clear as light  
If mother's sick, then all the world's unwell;  
And yet she scarcely leaves me from her sight,  
And sneers at my life-aim to succor those  
Writhing in actual throes.  
And then, in living syllables, she spoke  
Of dear ambitions balked; and saw the flash  
Of interest, and a softness that awoke  
Within him; while, impetuous-tongued and rash,  
She rambled on. But she had struck a spark.  
He said but little — yet she guessed how much  
He left unmentioned. . . . When she felt his touch  
Brushing her arm by chance, she thrilled as though  
From an electric shock. His last remark,  
Just as he turned to go,

Would stay with her: "Your mother — I'll drop in  
On Monday, just to soothe her. There will be  
No charge, of course. And here's some medicine  
To calm her nerves. . . . On Monday, then, at three —"  
He paused; she knew his meaning when he beamed  
With boyish smiles; and suddenly it seemed  
That all her world was April.

## V

Sally jeered

About the young physician: "Short of brains,  
Like all the rest! Loretta, as I've feared,  
He's found some deep disturbance which my pains  
Darkly foreboded. Bess and Sue have told  
How often on the doorstep he remains,  
Holding you there, and whispering in the cold, —  
No, don't deny it — things turn black indeed  
Before a doctor will confer apart  
With long and anxious speech. But it's my heart —  
Yes, my poor heart, which beats with breakneck speed  
And soon must stop, I know."

All self-concerned,

She did not read her daughter's face that burned  
As with a fever-flush; nor see her brood  
Far-eyed, withdrawn, in an absent-smiling mood.  
But sharp the waking. Sally sprang from bed,  
Trembling and hot; railed like a tortured soul  
That evening when Loretta slipped away  
Without excuse . . . and when lewd gossip said  
That she and Doctor Hyde were seen to stroll  
Arms interlinked, and mooned throughout the play,  
Lost in each other. What! the unnatural girl!  
To leave her mother for a trousered scamp!  
Sally might die — in fact, even now her lamp  
Was guttering faint and fast! but in the whirl  
Of her man-chase, the ingrate would not care!



So Sally, groaning, sought her bed again,  
And turned the lights all low, and called the priest;  
And wore the patient air  
Of a saintly Daniel threatened by the beast;  
Then, muttering of the carnal ways of men,  
She shrilled a warning cry, "Beware! Beware!"

Loretta smiled to hear her. Still she kept  
Her secret moon-trysts; and the envious noted  
She walked with a springing tread, like one who stepped  
Upon elastic pavements; or she floated  
As though on languid streams  
In warm, dew-lidded dreams,  
And over her cheeks a fresh rose-blossoming spread . . .  
Until at last, after a year tripped by,  
She had her choice — the choice of light or lead,  
Gray dusk, or sunny sky.

He rushed to her with triumph in his glance,  
And merrily seized her hands: "Loretta dear,  
Rejoice for me! I've had a gift — a chance  
To rise in my career!"  
Out of the city's live warm heart a call  
Had flashed to him — his friends had paved the way  
With artful care. "You'd not believe at all  
It's true, it's true! Today's my luckiest day!"  
And he swung her arms, so jubilantly gay  
At first he could not see  
The slow salt trickles gathering from her eyes;  
Then, witness to her grief in hurt surprise,  
He pleaded, "But of course you'll come with me!  
Loretta, in the city's freer air,  
You'll be the Priceless One I've longed to claim!  
And you will lift your sails, and study there  
To speed your own life-aim!"  
He paused; he drew her close; his moist eyes shone  
So warmly, glowing with such mute devotion

She felt he offered her a crown, a throne,  
And choked with her emotion;  
And for a moment, vision-wafted, flew  
Along a sky of never-fading blue  
Held in the arms of him, the loved, the true,  
Who clasped her always. . . . Then, like one who wakes  
From some exhilarating dream of bliss  
Into the sad day's worries, toils and aches,  
She started back. "But mother! — can I go  
And leave her for the far metropolis?"  
And some bleak voice — a dull, reverberant sound  
Out of the prison-house where she was bound —  
Solemnly answered, "No!"

## VI

Caged, with torn wings, she beat against the bars.  
But who that breathes the air is truly free?  
Within a universe where even the stars  
Are swung by viewless mandates, there can be  
No actual independence. With the fire  
Of all her hopes, Loretta burned to leave  
At Michael's side; but, stouter than desire,  
Was habit, which could offer no reprieve,  
And quivering compunctions, loftily born  
Out of a filial heart; remorse, and fears  
That she would view with self-accusing scorn  
Her deeds, in after-years;  
And the thought of Sally, nurseless and forlorn,  
Languishing deathward; and her mother's voice,  
Acid as curdled milk: "Yes, flee my bed!  
None will declare that I have swayed your choice  
By even a breath! Then, surely, you'll rejoice  
When finally I am dead!"

By that remote postponement which may hold  
More torment than the sudden death of hope,  
She made herself a Sisyphus who rolled



Great stones along a never-mounted slope.  
Almost she answered, "Yes!",  
But Sally crumbled from her next attack;  
And, like one on a rack,  
Dreading each pronged new tremor of distress,  
She dallied still; and Michael went away;  
And time dragged on; and at his plea, she meant  
To join him . . . but there rose a fresh delay,  
A fresh relapse, like gathering barriers sent  
By scoffing providence. Of course, she'd go  
At last to be his bride; yet hesitant weeks  
Piled into months, and months into a year,  
And every time new ardor flushed her cheeks,  
Sally, by some odd chance, was stricken low;  
And thus they drifted, everything unclear  
And waxing always foggier; for the mind  
And heart of man have not the furnace-strength  
To keep a sun-hot blaze forever bright.  
Bit by unnoticed bit their zeal declined,  
And love became remembrance, and at length  
A message, poisonous as a serpent's bite,  
Reached her from Michael: "Darling, it is plain  
We cannot fumble on forever thus.  
Hope cannot bear the tug, nor nerves the strain.  
So let us end it, without pangs or fuss.  
For you it will be best  
To clutch no cloud-pavilions that recede;  
And as for me — the truth must be confessed:  
I am a man; and feel perpetual need  
To have a helpmate near me. There is one —  
I'll not describe her, but she is a nurse,  
And young and clever —"

From Loretta's grip  
The paper dropped; the very universe  
Swung round; the table whirled; the ceiling spun  
In crazed gyrations; something seemed to trip

Her feet; and when they found her on the floor,  
 She moaned, half conscious: "He is not to blame!  
 Not he — not he! What was he waiting for?  
 Why should I hold him?" . . . Later, in her shame  
 And anger that another clasped the mate  
 Rightfully hers, she accused herself at first;  
 Then, at the thought of Sally, scarring hate  
 Seared through her; and she could have railed, and cursed  
 Her parent's name . . . till, in a cooling hour,  
 She knew not Sally, nor herself, nor he  
 Whom she would greet no more, should be condemned;  
 But all their sorrow, all their burden stemmed  
 From life itself — from life, whose mad-bull power  
 Tosses and tramples men with a witless glee.  
 Yet oh, could she but turn  
 The pages backward even one little year,  
 Then, though her mother raised a high spiked fence,  
 No longer would she spurn  
 The solace and arms of love, grown doubly dear  
 Now that the gulf had spread impassable and immense!

And still she beat the cage-bars; but the door  
 Was double-locked, and clamped securely down.  
 Wall-bound she lived, vain-fluttering as before,  
 Her days all garmented in dun and brown.  
 And Sally lingered; and it seemed she grew  
 No worse, no better; while with lengthening years  
 Loretta's sisters one by one withdrew  
 Into the city, or with grateful ears  
 Heard bridal anthems ring. And mould and rust  
 Gathered around the recluse, who became  
 Withered of skin; a hard, old-maidenly crust  
 Covered her, and her eyes had dimmed their flame.  
 And long, long afterwards, when Sally died  
 At eighty-seven, of no ill but age,  
 Loretta dully took her heritage,  
 The big old house where now she must reside



Alone; and merciless remorse, that paced  
The midnight watches, and communed with ghosts,  
Looked out across the years' fog-hooded coasts,  
And cried, "For what the waste?  
For what great good deny my sons unborn?  
Shackle the healing hand that longed to taste  
Of service? crush the flower of love, and scorn  
The rose of life, to bleed upon the thorn?"

And thus, from the gray pits of her despair,  
I heard a voice that, quavering, spoke like prayer:

"Oh, that a larger life might come to each  
After the snags and quicksands of the quest,  
So that the dangled fruit we failed to reach  
Might be at last possessed!

"Oh, that the branching trail we would not take,  
Where hope and beauty begged a rainbowed tryst,  
Might be refound, to let us finally slake  
Our thirst at pools we missed!

"Oh, that the idols which have sucked our all  
Would not inexorably keep their toll!  
That robber fortune would consign its haul  
Back to the cheated soul!

"Oh, that the door once locked would not be barred  
Forever! that the treasures fate has tossed  
And fumbling hands clutch blindly or discard  
Would not be utterly lost!

"Oh, for a second chance, a wiser trial,  
That life, the unrelenting judge, may bend,  
And, through one faulty turning of the dial,  
All radiance need not end!"

Now, softer-toned, there came another plea  
From the same speaker: "How I envy those  
Who reach the pinnacles where they crave to be,  
And have a chance to heal the wounds and woes  
Of suffering multitudes!" And, as she spoke,  
The scene was shifted; and I gazed anew  
Upon the brick-ridged city's walls and smoke,  
And a bold figure rose into my view,  
As far in deeds from the solemn gray old maid  
As fabled Camelot from the steam of trade.



## PART VII

### ANDREW MALINTROP

#### I

There was a hand ten thousand hands had pressed,  
An eye that fifty thousand glances wooed.  
There was a man whose brass-emblazoned chest  
Puffed like a bantam's where the multitude  
Crowded and saluted. . . . In a walled retreat  
Heavy with guns and many a clanking gate,  
While lands and armies postured at his feet,  
I saw a Chief of State,  
A bull-necked figure, with bull-angry eyes  
Popping above small bluish bags of fat, —  
Dark orbs that twisted and shifted like a spy's, —  
And manner that by turns  
Was unruly as a boar, and mincing as a cat,  
And oily as the doorman of millionaire concerns.  
Bear-shouldered, with a bassoon voice, and skin  
Veined like a leaf in branching lines of red,  
Mighty of paunch, with wrinkling double chin,  
Ruttled and acid cheeks, and hairless head,  
He wore his three score years like a huge weight  
Tied by invisible chains about his neck.  
He, who had ruled contemptuous of fate,  
Drew near to time's inevitable wreck.

Backward I gazed, behind the din and glare,  
The bannered mob, the foxes and the crows  
That cawed or slithered round the revered knees,  
Behind the tank parade, the tinselled square,  
The sentries flashing steel in glittering rows,  
The creamed orations, and the barbed decrees, —

Backward, far back; and saw a flint-eyed lad  
Sprung of a cobbler's bench, who shoved his way  
Amid the rabble, grimy-faced, and clad  
In sweaty work-clothes; and I heard him sway  
The thousands with denunciations hot  
As furnace belchings. . . . How his complaints rang out  
At gorging wolves that cursed the toiler's lot!  
And how the throngs would gather at his shout,  
And cheer with echoing calls,  
And vow to follow, thundering, at his lead,  
And topple down the walls  
Of power and greed!  
But who can fathom all the sinuous tracks  
Coiled in the pits and labyrinths of his mind  
And say if Andrew looked, in his own sight,  
A new Messiah in these green attacks?  
Too often he'd beheld slave-manacles bind  
The droop-necked people clawed amid the fight  
For house and bread; too often, on the shelf  
Of his own father, seen the last stale crust  
Vanish, while little voices hungrily cried.  
So who shall say if most the fire of self  
Or zeal for neighbors ruled the knife-edged thrust  
By which he battled for the crucified?

But life, that signs her ultimate signature  
With actions more than words, would test his boast  
To strike as champion of the ragged host;  
The witch Temptation, with her courtesan lure,  
Would manifest the gods he valued most.  
Long, with reverberent denunciations,  
Andrew had blustered at the armament firms,  
Which dealt, he roared, in flesh and bone of nations,  
And sold a sea of blood on paying terms.  
Hottest of all he charged the Duque cartel,  
The most renowned, which wove in many lands.  
"All hail, the gatemen and the Czars of hell,



Who clamp the world in tightening crimson bands,  
And for their own fat purse  
Scatter a skullbone curse  
Across the universe!  
Come, let us crush it with our own good hands!"

And he'd inspired his thousands; and his blows  
Rained like a thunder storm; and it was said  
A tumult and a trembling shook the foes,  
Who less audaciously, in new-born dread,  
Maneuvered for the red destroyer's spread.  
How came it then one day  
After his loudest, his most flaying stroke,  
A minion of Duque, old Colonel Rand, requested  
A private meeting? Was this then a joke?  
Andrew lurched forward; after brief delay,  
Faintly aware that he was being tested  
As by dark proddings of a secret sin,  
He growled an oath; he grunted, "Show him in!"

The visitor smiled queerly from one eye  
Bright as a jay's, and one of staring glass.  
Twin medals, glistening in graven brass,  
Shouted of wars gone by.  
"We meet as friends? You may not understand  
The ways of the great firm I represent.  
And so I come to show you," rumbled Rand.  
"While seeming black, we are not demon-sent.  
No! though the fog within your eyes may blind you,  
We're really patriots of a brilliant stripe,  
Who toil to put strong armaments behind you  
And shield you when your neighbors' plots are ripe.  
And he that knows this truth and lets it guide him  
May find some rare and priceless gift supplied him  
That life, perhaps, had otherwise denied him."

The speaker paused, his one good eye a-gleam

So fiercely that the glitter almost cut.  
And Andrew, his square jaws securely shut,  
Knew, without speaking, here was the Chance Supreme.  
Then, in the silence, all the mantled aims  
Of his whole lifetime rose in stern debate.  
His root-desires, and not his surface claims,  
Rushed to decide his fate.  
Strange! in that startled moment, when the world  
Reeled in its tracks, no picture met his sight  
Of glaze-eyed, scarlet armies doomward hurled  
Or cities gashed and cindery in the fight.  
Suddenly all the ranting and oration  
Of all his days, seemed as a childhood game.  
What! could it be he glowed with admiration  
Of the very Duque he'd scorched with shot and flame?  
And was it true, could it be true, he wondered,  
It was no firehob dragon, but a friend  
Seen in disguise, which though it stamped and thundered  
Would save the world from shellwreck in the end?  
And would he not be doing  
A favor to his land  
If artfully pursuing  
The ways of Colonel Rand?  
And if they stoutly armed it  
Would they not daunt the foes  
Who cravenly had harmed it  
Where peace petitions rose?  
But all the masks unveiled before his vision,  
The pure white curtains spread to dim his eyes,  
Could not completely blur the blunt decision,  
"Here is my chance, at last my chance to rise!  
So let me take it, let me grasp the prize!"

True! pondering days and long floor-pacing nights,  
And tremblings and reversals and retreats,  
And haunting shades of his old youthful fights,  
Would intervene; and slow remorse that eats



The joy of victory, and quivering fear,  
And one sharp stroke that with a rapier sting  
And a reproach forever lingering  
Would haunt him many a year.

Olga, the black-eyed, was a living bolt  
Of flaming energy — not five feet tall,  
As reckless and impetuous as a colt,  
And with a mind as large as her frame was small.  
At many a workers' council she had stood  
By Andrew's side, or, from a platform, spoke  
In bell-clear syllables, of brotherhood  
And a new world beyond the battle smoke.  
No toiler in the Cause  
More passionately labored than this girl  
With her thin eager face, and earnest voice.  
And she and Andrew, pulled together by laws  
Beyond control or choice,  
With fervent clinging hands and heads a-whirl,  
Decided, though in poverty, to dare  
The gods of marriage.

Never a word he said  
Of his queer dealings with the Duque cartel,  
But from his half withdrawn, half furtive air,  
She easily might have read  
Not all was well.  
After a month, there came a party meeting,  
When his voice echoed in an aisle-packed hall  
Before five hundred grimy delegates.  
"Often, my friends, with vitriol and gall,"  
He cried, in bawls and bellows of entreating,  
"I've sprayed the makers of bombs and armor plates.  
But in my seething zeal  
For our dear country's weal  
What if at times I've overlooked our need  
For mightier weapons — guns, and ships of steel?"

Strength is the law of nature. Power alone  
Can stamp us out a bright, world-honored name.  
Only by weapons we'll embrace our own,  
By weapons stride to splendor and acclaim,  
Only by weapons make our enemies quail,  
By weapons show an Alexander's heart,  
By weapons conquer —"

Like an uncoiled dart  
Far in the rear a figure slim and frail  
Flashed to her feet. In vehement tones and shrill  
She charged against the speaker; and her cries  
Clear as glass tinkling, biting as a drill,  
Made her the focus of a thousand eyes.  
"You deal in lies, lies, lies!  
Turncoat! Oh, yellow turncoat! Must you sell us  
To the hawk talons that would tear us down?  
What fiend possesses you? Perhaps you'll tell us  
Why the old terror now must wear a crown?  
You, to whose arm we looked as to a savior  
From ravishers that would foul and slay mankind,  
Now, by your turn-about, your swine behavior,  
Have left us leaderless, reeling and blind.  
Oh, shame, shame, shame! . . ."

With tiny quivering fists  
She beat as though to pound him; but the tears  
Flooded her eyes with streaming sudden mists,  
And while a mingling of applause and jeers  
Shook the great hall, she turned and with a sob  
Groped for the doorway. Speechless, blazing red,  
One on the platform stared, and with a throb  
Of swift emotion, half inaudibly said,  
"Olga!" — no more! . . . And that was years ago,  
Long fiery years; but through the flame and flow  
Of seasons granting him all gifts but one,  
That scene still cursed him like a present blow.



But mostly, in the swirl and rush of time,  
He could forget the wound; he could forget  
How Olga, though he'd not forgive her crime,  
Intrigued against him yet  
Across the border, all her love embittered  
With black and cancerous hatred. Ranting fool!  
When she in gay-tiled mansions might have glittered,  
And rustling at his side, have shared the rule  
Of a great empire! So he tried to feel,  
But all the hammering arguments he brought  
To sheath his ways in white, could but reveal  
A doubt that would not heal.

Still, in a private trial, before the court  
Of his own flexible thought,  
Andrew, the judge and plaintiff, pled his case,  
Propounded the verdict, and redeemed his face.  
He could not see himself through simple eyes  
As plunderer of the temple where he'd knelt,  
But merely as a warrior waxing wise,  
Who planned campaigns for practical gods, and dwelt  
In practical dominions. When he found  
A highway over bleeding necks of friends  
Of graves of women loved, perhaps he sighed,  
But his tears were quickly dried,  
For he never doubted any course was sound  
Which gained his ends.

And since the world flings garlands to success  
(Although the hero creep to power or wealth  
By bullet-holes, or clubs, or spidery stealth),  
He felt approval's fawning cat-caress,  
While purring sycophants slid round his sleeve,  
And flattery pursed her lips to flirt and woo  
And spread the rose-mirages that deceive  
All who desire them true.  
So, through myopic vanity, which mocks

Man's reason with a leering paradox,  
The more he sank in thought, in deeds, in soul,  
And crawled beneath the jackal and the fox,  
The more he seemed to clasp a starry goal,  
And heard, like echoes of self-spoken praise,  
Dove-voices cooing he was lion-strong,  
And stoats confirming, steeling him in ways  
Of anti-human wrong.

III

Never an eye but his would read the tale  
Of how he rose by dagger-swift ascents  
From post to mightier post, until his trail  
Throbbled with the boom and crash of world events.  
Never an eye but his would see what feints,  
What weaving machinations in the night,  
What buzzard feasts, what dog-like love of taints,  
Helped him into the height.  
But carrion deeds from which he too of old  
Would have recoiled as from a cobra's dart,  
Gave not a twinge of nausea in that mart  
Where truth was merchandise men bought and sold.

Finally, perched in splendor, potentate  
In all but name, with an elastic power  
To move his countrymen and mould the state,  
What did he reap from his Olympian dower?  
Here was the chance to fructify those aims  
That had incensed his youth; to save the mass  
From sniffing bias shouldering class from class,  
And red, flesh-ripping claws, and the toil that maims.  
But one might ask as soon  
The butterfly to seek the sloughed cocoon;  
As fruitfully might beg  
The duckling to return into the egg,  
As to expect this lord to keep alive



His youth's lost incarnation, and retain  
Old gods he'd buried. Though the world survive  
Unaltered, still the spirit that has lain  
In ruts of mire, will gaze at clouds in vain.

But for himself — did no keen spice of joy  
Tickle his palate with a personal bliss?  
No! only pride, whose sirupy grapes would cloy;  
And praise that, with monotonous emphasis,  
Was ever the same; and the breast-puffing sense  
Of Jovian rank and near-omnipotence  
That fed him in the blustering council-hall,  
But as a fare for lonely days and nights  
Was as a dish of foam. As age crept near,  
At times the clatter of victorious fights,  
The flags, the ministers bowing low, and all  
The blare and strut, would strangely disappear,  
And he would see himself, by some weird flash,  
A phantom emperor in a phantom court  
Whose palaces and pinnacles were ash,  
And all his triumphs wraiths of his own thought.

While he sat posing, on a sentried seat,  
And drank the plaudits from the public square,  
This was the plaint that, like an old sad air,  
I heard his lips repeat:

“The mountaintop, remotely seen  
From the dozing plain below,  
Appears a luminous land, serene  
In white and indigo.  
But ah, the veiled crevasse and rocks!  
Blue glaciers piled in jagged blocks!  
Saw-ridges, and the crystal frocks  
That hide the chasmed snow!

"The mountaintop is a monarch's place  
Where the eagles wheel and nest,  
But lonely as super-lunar space  
For one who gains the crest.  
His lungs will gasp, will pant, in air  
Cold as an icicle point and rare,  
And his hurt, unshaded eyes will stare  
At the whole world's burning breast.

"The mountaintop is a haunt for him  
Of the hermit will and mind,  
Who wrestles with clouds, in a war so grim  
He haughtily scorns mankind.  
But the hare, the mouse on the valley floor,  
May nibble the grain, and suck life's core,  
While he, with bleeding gums, must bore  
Into the horny rind!"

"How much," said Andrew, "do I envy those  
Who walk the level, uneventful street,  
Humming a tune, or marveling at a rose,  
And hold their private loves and pleasure sweet."  
And at these syllables, I turned to view  
One of the crowd, moth-driven to pursue  
No more than unremembered myriads do.



PART VIII

AUBREY VAN DUSEN III

I

This man was polished as a silver plate  
And shiny as an apple rubbed for sale.  
The gloss began with the high ruddy pate,  
And scarcely seemed to miss one small detail.  
Across his florid countenance it spread,  
His bulbous nose but slightly veined with red,  
And on his cheeks, as glistening and round  
And chubby as a child's; his mien assured  
As one enthroned and crowned,  
And trim pink nails all neatly manicured;  
And his whole portly figure, belted tight  
To keep the unruly central bulge from sight.  
His clothes as well were polished, from the hat  
Down to the mirror-brilliant shoes; he wore  
A monogrammed silk shirt, a bright cravat,  
Suede gloves, and trousers creased until they bore  
A ruled and filed appearance. Polished, too,  
His manners, with a way all velvet sleek,  
Although his drawling tone at times would tell  
Of boredom, which his eyes of tepid blue  
Languidly emphasized. Polished the halls  
Where clubmen lounged in spongy leather chairs,  
Smoking and chatting; though the fretted squares  
Of the high ceilings, and the book-lined walls,  
Made odd accompaniment to glasses clinking,  
And the familiar sight of Aubrey drinking.  
And polished as a glaze  
His air at some vociferous sports event,  
When to the champion in the tournament  
He passed a golden cup; or let his gaze

Hopefully travel down the dusty course  
To the fierce hoofbeats of his favorite horse;  
Or when he perched aboard  
His yacht the *Lucia*, putting out to sea  
Lawless and chainless as a gull, and poured  
Jewels and wine for some jade-necklaced she,  
Whom, in a well-oiled voice, a courtly purr,  
He welcomed like a prince and connoisseur.

Always, since life was young,  
Not being one compelled, like common flesh,  
To squirm amid the world's commercial mesh,  
He'd feasted, reveled and sung.  
In the stone mansion where his parents reigned,  
With flunkies bowing and smirking at the door  
And swishing parties on the ballroom floor,  
And private shows and bibulous bouts, he'd gained  
A ducal freedom. Life was all for fun!  
Work? When his father's dividends overflowed!  
Or study? When the blessing must be won  
By moiling mustily, mirthless as a toad!  
Let others tie their necks! For him one treasure  
Flamed, and outshone the rest beyond all measure.  
His goal, his god, his one ideal was pleasure!  
And why poor man, cooped in his cage of time,  
Should seek the clouds and stars, or fail to drain  
The foaming bowl before he passed his prime,  
Was mystery too baffling for his brain.  
Come feast! come drink, and riot!  
Join in a devil's whirl!  
Too long in the grave we're quiet,  
With never a dew-lipped girl!  
Let arms be twining, clinging,  
And fingers tap a tune!  
Southward the sun is winging,  
And it's not forever June.



## II

And yet one tutoring shock he had from life,  
 One gift denied, one bright exploring glance  
 Beyond seductive gateways, swiftly barred.  
 Although he swore he'd never let a wife  
 Clamp down his hands, upon a day ill-starred  
 He had encountered Phyllis. Quite by chance  
 He saw her wrenching fall, with ankle twisted,  
 Striking the avenue with a sharp, short cry.  
 And finding himself the nearest passer-by,  
 He spurted from the car; offered his aid,  
 And drove her home, though she at first resisted  
 With tortured protests.

Oddly she had made  
 A memory-haunting mark on Aubrey's mind.  
 Her ridged firm features, not the flower kind  
 He had pursued in many a moth flirtation,  
 Her crystal-pure gray eyes, and candid smile  
 Free from a red lip-smear or pencilled guile,  
 Somehow had rocked him with an agitation  
 He could not master. Though her home was far  
 From the gay-foyered tower suites he'd known  
 (No less, no more than common thousands are  
 In the city's medium apartment zone),  
 He found himself returning. Stranger yet,  
 It almost seemed his recurrent calls were met  
 With doubt and hesitation — half rebuffs  
 That, like fresh goadings, only served to whet  
 His admiration. . . . "Aubrey, stop! you dolt!"  
 He'd warn himself; and vow to keep away.  
 But some wild power beyond his will would sway  
 His steps, and pierce him like a flaming bolt, —  
 A joy, a fire, a sweetness  
 That always he had missed  
 In loves of summer fleetness  
 And the purchased lip and tryst,  
 A truth in the clear beaming

Aubrey

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Of that heaven-lighted face,  
Not garnished by jewels gleaming,  
But by a natural grace.

For her — yes, he would toss upon the wind  
His old abhorrence of all riveting ties.  
For her he would be tamed — be disciplined,  
And mimic no more the bees or butterflies.  
Yet when he faced her, one unhappy night,  
Within her small, drab-cushioned living-room,  
And tried to limn for her a future bright  
With gems, and orange bloom,  
Somehow he faltered. He beheld the stare  
Of large, round, troubled, level-searching eyes,  
The Juno brow under the clipped-off hair,  
The look that, startlingly, was old and wise  
Beyond her years. In one bewildering flash  
It seemed to him a spirit aged as time  
Peeped out, and sorrowed; and his urgings, rash  
And half-considered, like the broken chime  
Of bells that suddenly stop, died on his lips;  
And it was she that spoke.

“Oh, Aubrey, please!

I’ve tried, in great unease,  
To come to grips  
With this same problem. Yet the truth is clear.  
The bird of paradise can never mate  
With the plain thrush. I would not regulate,  
Nor seek to alter your rich-plumed career,  
But on what different ground we two have built!  
My people are common folk, and all my days  
I’ve watched men’s groping, heaving, sweaty fight  
To rear not palaces of silk and gilt,  
But tenements where life’s dark browns and grays  
May be relieved by hints of mellower light.  
Not much I’ve done, but in the white-robed corps  
Of a great laboratory I have served,



Trying to open even one lesser door  
 Of usefulness. True, I have often swerved  
 And fallen beneath my goal. And you will say  
 I'm stuffy as a mummy; even so  
 (Though I'm not criticizing), this I know:  
 Your way is not my way.  
 No! not for all John Rockefeller's riches  
 Would I embrace existence that bewitches  
 Only with gauds and bubbles!"

Through a cloud  
 He saw her face, remote and more remote  
 Like a dark angel where the copper lamp  
 Shed pale reflections; yet somehow endowed  
 With rarer loveliness, a saintly stamp  
 On her clear cheeks, bent head, and quivering throat.

"But Phyllis, listen! I can make your days  
 Soft as a satin pillow. I can line  
 Your path with feathers, crown your hours with praise  
 Of halls and salons; build a rosy shrine —  
 Listen! —" He paused. The silence that ensued  
 Vibrated with the hopelessness of his plea.  
 And with breath-taking knowledge, sudden and rude,  
 For an instant he could see  
 Her judgment on his life's fatuity. . . .  
 Then he had left, with sorrow in his heart  
 Less at her loss (though long the hurt would smart)  
 Than at himself revealed on a pride-wounding chart.

### III

Yet this was but one sting  
 Nettling the years of bright philandering.  
 A gilded drone, he fluttered round the world;  
 The Riviera and green orchid isles  
 Would call him often; and the sorceress wiles  
 Of sirens elegantly gowned and pearled

*Aubrey V*

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Upon the Champs Elyssées or the Strand,  
Beckoned in passing. Women, horses, wine,  
An evening's laughter and a fondling hand,  
And life was rainbowed, and the stars benign.

But youth, the nectar-sipper, cannot draw  
Only the honey from the bowl of days.  
Time, that austere protagonist of law,  
Is the one sovereign every man obeys.  
A golden arc which narrows at the end,  
The years that lead to thirty; sharp and steep  
The paths that from the fortieth turn descend,  
While, under all, shadows and silence creep.  
Like a colossal trap whose jaws one sees  
Slowly approaching, but cannot escape,  
The monster Age, a slavering toothless shape,  
Winds close, winds closer, by unmarked degrees.  
And with usurious claws it reaches out  
To seize, at high compounding rates, the tax  
That youth intended, with a reel and shout,  
To make the fates relax.

So Aubrey found that no ambrosia lasts,  
That thorns outlive the scattering of the rose,  
That every feast requires its toll of fasts,  
That every song gives way to flatfoot prose,  
And pleasure, the wanton, flames and spurts and goes,  
And — bitterest gibe! — that jocund hours which die  
Pour blackness on the heart, and tears into the eye.

But even when the night  
Shook with the screams of glee,  
When banquet lamps were bright,  
And hands and lips were free;  
Yes! even when the head  
Danced with delirious fumes,  
And arms and eyes were fed



On fair and sumptuous blooms,  
Ah, even then, after cold dawn had come  
And shone on drooping lids, and garlands frayed,  
The strings of ecstasy were stricken dumb,  
And the dull self must face the self, arrayed  
In all its native meanness. Strange and sad  
That temptress glamour cannot buy content,  
And that the clap of revelry, sparkle-glad,  
Fades with the tavern lights, and, being spent,  
Offers the hungering mind no nourishment.  
Clamped in an unseen vise, he could not doff  
The weights that bound him to himself, nor shake  
The iron of an old unhappiness off,  
The sense of pleasure dreamed, for life to scoff  
When the dreamer comes awake.

As by some tragic jest, the more he tried  
To brim his hours with opal froth of play,  
The more he felt the hollowness inside,  
The more old fidgeting boredom came to stay.  
And time was long; and sandy barrens spread  
Around each palm-oasis of delight;  
And tedium, that pressed like blocks of lead,  
Harnessed his limbs, his neck, and held them tight.  
And in the cocktail lounge, where he at first  
Courtied but frolic moments, now he sought  
Assuagement of that most insatiable thirst,  
Deliverance from the Real, from pain, from thought  
And all those terrors that the unshielded mind  
Sees burning from the pitiless brow of Fact.  
Cover the eyes! Pleasure is for the blind,  
Who may not trace, in outlines too exact,  
Life's skull-marked features. Yet not sport nor wine,  
Parties of roaring wit, arms that would twine,  
Night's panting orgies or the slumberous day,  
Could quench the sting of brine.  
And with the years

The sting grew sharper, and the rapture less  
From that shrill gaiety which smothered fears.  
Strangely, it seemed to him that happiness  
Called on his sparrow-drab and house-bound kin,  
Who worked, and dandled babes, and kissed their wives;  
While he, in the iris courts of joy and sin,  
Was cut as though by knives.

## IV

But only when the hawk-beak of disease  
Slashed in the dark, and the rebellious flesh,  
Pain-shaken, quivered with protesting pleas,  
Could he perceive how cruelly the mesh  
Of his own days had trapped him. What reserves  
In his bleak self's uncultivated waste?  
What balm to drug the mind and numb the nerves?  
He fondled a vial of salts, whereof one taste  
Would bear him freedom; though he still delayed,  
While scatter-brained courage turned her face and fled,  
And hope, the firefly, winked its lamp, and played  
With agony and dread.  
Perhaps, on some calm morning not remote,  
A servant at the club would turn his door,  
And find a figure sprawled across the floor,  
Stone-silent, in one hand a scribbled note;  
But likelier still that he would linger on,  
Pudgy and sour and gray,  
And, in a dodderer's wheezy voice, would mourn  
The lights of yesterday;  
While every time his eyes of washed-out flame  
Fell on a youth of Phoebus face or frame,  
He'd sigh, "Ah, to possess his virile years!";  
And pine from old desires he could not tame.

And these the words that, as the jeers and quips  
Of fortune snapped against his flesh like whips,  
Poured in a briny current from his lips:



"Oh, the summer gnat as it flashes round  
Is the soul of happy flight.  
It loops in the sun when the day is long,  
And humming its Lilliputian song,  
It twinkles high with the whirling throng  
And dances amid the light.

"In and about, and in and about,  
Where the laurel glades are green!  
But the summer's radiant world will end,  
And the sun sink low, and the frost descend,  
And where, oh where, when the storm-gales rend,  
Will the glittering sprite be seen?

"And who would not blissfully be the gnat  
As it gyrates along the air?  
But ah, when the season of nipped leaves comes,  
And noon is shadowed, and silence numbs,  
And the tiny fiddle no longer strums,  
And the glades are brown and bare!"

Alone within the deep, slow-lingering dusk,  
Aubrey reflected: "How I envy those  
Who, wandering far from where life's midstream flows,  
May reap some harvest richer than a husk, —  
Men with the eyes and brains to dwell apart  
Where winter may less cruelly scar the heart!"  
And at these words, as when a pictured face  
Fades on a screen, and an altered landscape stares,  
I peered across the labyrinths of space  
To one beset by different hopes and cares,  
Haunted by different loves, challenged by different snares.

PART IX

JOHN HATHAWAY

I

Always they whispered that the man was queer,  
Perched eagle-lonely on his hillside farm.  
Some of the townsfolk, when he passed, would sneer  
And mumble he was versed in devil's ways;  
But others swore that there was little harm  
In "Batty John," though even less to praise.  
For surely one who dwelt so high aloof  
And roamed the woods for hours without an end  
With only Rex, his shepherd dog, for friend,  
And asked no neighbor underneath his roof  
To tinkle comradely glasses, feast and smoke,  
Trade yarns, and swear, and joke,  
Was something less than human. Many a time  
They saw his pipe-thin form against the ridge  
Of granite *Baldy*, on a day-long climb;  
And some had seen him staring from a bridge  
Over *White Torrent*, with a far dream-look;  
Or couched beneath a flowering apple tree,  
His eyes a-sparkle, in his hand a book;  
Or following with fixed gaze an ant or bee,  
Veery or robin. Travelers near his place  
Would watch him ramble by the mossed stone wall,  
His vision set upon the blue of space;  
And notice how, with never a thought at all,  
He grew his scraggly crop on the weedy ground.  
His cows ran wild; and how his chickens fled,  
With unclipped wings outspread,  
Was a standing joke for miles and miles around.



Yes, queer the man! and speechless as a rock!  
 Rarely he'd talk except in chipped-off words.  
 But noble the brow, with long dishevelled shock  
 Of ash-gray hair; his eyes, like a fierce bird's,  
 Deep-sunk, would narrow till they almost shut,  
 Yet, from their dark profundities, would glare  
 With a stiletto light that seemed to cut,  
 And balked the casual stare.  
 Hooked was his nose, with a jutting pirate beak;  
 Ill-shaven the face, with trenches on each cheek;  
 His countenance lean, and over the bony chin  
 The lips were stern and thin;  
 While strangely at times a vast unworldly calm,  
 As though he bathed in some ethereal balm,  
 Or listened, spellbound, to a saintly psalm,  
 Gathered upon him.

## II

Why he came or whence  
 To this harsh scrap of northern boulder-land,  
 None could relate; and none could understand  
 What hunger for the stony eminence  
 Lured him to buy the run-down place; repair  
 The sagging porch, patch up the ruined fence,  
 And cut new timbers for the rickety stair.  
 And they who saw his capped and booted form  
 Striding the dusk, or where the ice-jawed storm  
 Shrilled in blue barrens, would have been amazed  
 Could they have looked behind the mask, and gazed  
 Backward a score of years. . . .

Where commerce blazed  
 He stalked with a king's assurance, sprucely clad,  
 In ministerial collar, glowing-faced  
 And open-mannered, with the barest taste  
 Of gravity, but nothing strained or sad  
 In his young bearing. On a baited street  
 Where bright shop-windows drew the purse-elite,

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Between two high brick towers, the church was reared;  
And yet he found the chancel's quiet sweet,  
And could forget the town that, many-tiered,  
Loomed far around him. Radiant in his faith,  
He was not one who, drooling syrup-lipped,  
Oozed unctuous phrases, with belief a wraith —  
No! with his whole live spirit he had dipped  
Into the lustral fountains. In his mind,  
Since the floor-pacing nights of shaken youth,  
The worship of a splendor scarce defined,  
The intuitive quest of truth,  
Had fired him, filled him; and he vowed to serve  
At the white sanctuary of his God  
With arms uplifted, love that would not swerve,  
And courage like an adamant rod.

But seldom proof against the world's rebuffs  
Is that pure ideality which springs  
From simple innocence; the snarls and cuffs  
Of brawlers grappling, and the poison stings  
Of faith turned business-like, may deal a stroke  
Toxic as scorpion venom; and the heart  
Pierced and abraded by a treasonous dart,  
May grow a crust, may seek a muffling cloak.

Not long had John been pastor when he learned  
How many walked the road of piety  
Only in sandalled words; how few men burned  
With Christ-like ecstasy;  
But passions of the shop and style parade,  
And plumes and ribbons of the social show,  
Were far more real, more fervently displayed  
Than any heavenly glow.  
He saw how men, with prayer upon their lips  
And blackness in their minds, would bid and buy,  
Would praise the Lord, and then, with loaded chips,  
Would cheat and lie;



He saw how women, honored as devout,  
Would kneel, with glistening eyes; but, as they rose,  
Flung glances hard as an accusing shout  
At sisters brushing by in shabbier clothes;  
He saw how all, though goodness was their king  
And truth the fane where they would chant and sing,  
In deeds would worship not the true or good,  
But Power, and Ostentation, and would bring  
To Wealth, through mire-begotten, reverent bows  
And smiles of adoration. Were the signs  
Not plain as morning that the counting-house  
Was first of modern shrines?

### III

Yet with firm-bitten lips, he swore his oath.  
God willing, he would lead, though his appeal  
Won few disciples; fight the jungle growth  
Of worldly greed and lust by faith and zeal!  
But worldly greed and lust, alas! have roots  
Unreachable by the stormiest pulpit pleas.  
At first, indeed, he saw rose-tinted fruits  
Of his resolve when some fair devotees  
Sank down before him, and, on fluttering knees,  
Pledged soul's allegiance to the cause of light;  
But he observed how any rival gale  
Would whirl them, dead-leaf-fashion, left or right;  
How one, who married a creedless man, turned tail  
Like a vessel at full sail;  
While others, wearying, drifted from his hands,  
Mere sliding, slipping sands  
That left him baffled.

Over all, on high,  
One follower shone as his especial star.  
Lucy, the auburn-haired, was small and spry,  
And downy soft as fluffiest nestlings are.  
And when, a mass of silk and curls and lace,

This maid, with eyes like blue and lambent pools,  
Knocked at his door, he trembled at her grace  
And longed to dash aside conventional rules  
Of parson-like behavior. So demure  
She looked when she confessed her will to learn  
The ways of Jesus — so devout and pure —  
Who would not feel a sweep of fire, and yearn  
To bring her comfort? Many an afternoon,  
Often until the western light grew dim,  
She chatted in his study; very soon  
On topics less devotional than a hymn  
Their tongues were babbling; and he could foresee  
Uplands of wonder opening, just ahead,  
When they would walk a mutual path, and she  
Would soothe away the loneliness that spread  
Its cloud and frost around him, and with love  
Her lucent eyes were but a symbol of,  
Would help him do the work of One above.

But of this glory not a word had left  
His hesitant lips — though did not glances speak?  
Then, with the agony of one bereft,  
He faced the shock; he staggered, suddenly weak  
Before the incredible — her visits ended!  
Blankly he scanned the empty church and street,  
And, while the shadows of the damned descended,  
Truth jabbed him like a hook; they chanced to meet  
One night amid the avenue's blaze and blare.  
He gasped — that sable coat! and, shimmering there  
Half seen, on the open neck, great pearls whose charm  
She never used to wear!  
Not now for him her purring kitten air,  
Her smiles, her dimples — who had taken her arm?  
A corpulent silk-hatted one, whose frame,  
Immaculately clad, and cheeks flesh-red,  
Brought pictures of some bird of evil fame,  
Gruesomely fed!



She turned her eyes; and, as he watched her pass,  
A wind as from the Pole cut round his face,  
He shuddered; and he scarcely saw the mass  
Of arc-lit walkers. . . . With blind, tottering pace,  
Like one cast loose in unsubstantial space,  
He groped, half stumbling. Were the pair of them  
Forsaken by their God, that she could choose  
The flash, the bribery of a cloak or gem,  
The worship of the golden calf, and lose  
Love's weightless and intangible diadem?  
Then bitterness like a lash  
Scourged at his heart; and later, subtly altered,  
With neck that sagged and faith that paused and faltered,  
He heard the news, in a deadening thunder-crash,  
Of Lucy's fortune. She was joined to one  
Of the world's new barons. . . . "Think! the only son  
Of an oil millionaire! . . . A marvelous catch!"  
The gossips chimed, while John's whole being spun  
With vertigo, and nausea at the match.

## IV

"Mine was the fault, all mine!"  
He swore aloud, when, brooding late at night,  
Chin cupped in palm, in a self-scourging spell,  
He asked why this chastisement had to smite.  
"Henceforth I shall not bow at any shrine  
Save God's; for women, as the sages tell,  
Shear us and leave us, with Delilah wiles!"  
And now his congregation found his mien  
Grown sterner; and his sermons foamed with rage  
At "Mammon's crew"; his features waxed more lean,  
And wrinkling lines, sharp-etched as though by files,  
Seemed as the premature reports of age.  
Yet with exuberant zeal,  
A flagellant's crackling force,  
Like one intent to deal

Raw breast-wounds of remorse,  
Or like one passionately given to foil  
The meshes and seductions of the world,  
John preached, until he felt his vehemence boil,  
And, leaping imponderable bars, was hurled  
Into a battlefield.

His audience long  
Had heard him fulminate at "sins of pelf";  
But since a parson's trade demands some wrong  
To blister before the throng,  
None took him seriously except himself.  
Yet there were barriers — little marked, but clear —  
No prudent man of God would try to leap;  
For him salvation's dusky stratosphere,  
While men of practical affairs would reap  
Harvests the firm and practical earth held dear.  
But when the Board, through its keen business head,  
Cajoled a broker all the world admired  
To build another vestry for the Church,  
John lost his wits (or so his critics said),  
When he burst forward, like a madman fired  
By demon prods, and cried, "His touch would smirch!  
Is not his record slippery as an eel's?  
And was his rise not made  
By slithering ascents and slimy deals,  
And snake manipulations that betrayed  
The babe and widow? Friends, the coin he flings  
Is tainted coin, and we will share the stain  
If we but touch it! Sooner far would I  
Rear a bark temple where the wild dove wings,  
And sup on roots and berries, than remain  
In walls that plunder's hirelings hammer high!"

Incredulously the Members rubbed their eyes.  
The donor — heaven bless his name! — had done  
No more than many a Walt or Williamson,



No more than Burke or Brown — and why despise  
 The winnings from the wheel of enterprise?  
 True, there were limits — if the cindery brand  
 Of scandal smudged him, they would shun his hand.  
 But nothing was ever proved, nothing at all  
 To stamp his generous present contraband.  
 Therefore they lost no time  
 In voting down their pastor; and with gall  
 Corroding his heart, and acid self-reproach,  
 He felt his house built on the sands of crime,  
 Felt Midas palms encroach.  
 Then, in a salt impassioned wave, the thought  
 Surged over him: abandon the bloated town  
 Where the idolatrous rabble brawled, and sought  
 The altar of Moloch! Let him find his crown  
 In the wide lonely world of blue and green,  
 Where priestly cedars rose, and winds were clean,  
 And the buffeted soul might kneel and grow serene.

But in a dizzying gust  
 The longing passed. Not easily or soon  
 The habits of a lifetime turn to dust;  
 Though his whole being was so out of tune  
 With those that paid his wage, and heard him preach,  
 That he was warned by some infallible sense  
 How time the wrecker would expand the breach  
 And force his last defense.

## V

One Sunday, while the long reverberant peals  
 Of organ glory soared in psalms of grace,  
 A squalid stranger, down at sleeves and heels,  
 With shirt flung open and unshaven face,  
 Slouched warily into church, and took a place  
 Far in the rear. Then haughtily from his side  
 The fashion-clad parishioners edged; and two,

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With fluttering bright silk dresses, rose and tried  
A distant pew.  
Thereat, as by a pre-concerted plan,  
A space was cleared about the ragged man,  
Who twitched and winced, then hastily turned to go.  
And John, who saw the bent form shuffling out,  
Felt as a personal wound the bruising blow  
That struck the stranger; felt as if a knout  
Had striped his flesh with crimson. Smoking ire –  
Volcanic power beyond himself – took flame;  
And when the moment came  
To speak his sermon, that new-kindled fire  
Still burned; and all the words he had prepared  
Burst out of mind, but with the rush and zest  
Of eloquent indignation, he declared  
His flock had met a test  
And failed. For surely the House of Prayer was made  
For all alike; and they who would not greet  
The patch-clad waif, the beggar of the street,  
Were faithless to their God, and self-betrayed.

His tongue was not his own; it was controlled  
By anger, reckless councillor, with her scorn  
Of trodden toes; and while his thunders rolled,  
He did not see a counter-anger born  
In many a sullen face. What! dared he say  
That all were snobs, who measured spirit-worth  
By surfaces – by surfaces and pay! –  
And would spit on Jesus, were He back on earth?  
And did he scourge Van Bergen's wife, or mean  
The heiress Hadley, in his pronged attacks  
On "petted darlings in a peacock sheen,"  
Who spent, and ate, and flaunted on their backs  
Wares that the sweat of worthier souls had grown?  
Even among his friends, a sensitive chord  
Was agitated; he had flashed a sword  
Straight to the bone.



But from the knife-edged silence when he sank  
Back to his seat, worn with an inner stress;  
And from the wall of something numb and blank  
That thrust about him, like an invisible bank  
Of fog and coldness, he could almost guess  
The thoughts unspoken.

Nor was he surprised  
When to his door a grave committee came,  
And he, in stuttering accents, was advised  
That some good ladies, whom they must not blame,  
Had lodged complaint. But surely, should he choose  
To be discreet,  
And offer quick retraction of his views,  
They might relent — yes, might forget the heat  
Of their sore grievance.

John, with cutting eyes,  
Gazed at the speaker, and his chin shot out:  
"It may be politic, it may be wise  
To yield, kind gentlemen, but have no doubt  
That, loudly though the coward tongue denies,  
Truth does not alter. Go, and tell them, friends,  
That what I said I said: I but report  
The hues I see, although the glass distort;  
And if they crave amends,  
Ask not of me, who speak but what I may.  
Tell them to bow their necks, and humbly pray  
To One our hearts revere and lips obey!"

Late, late at night, while still he saw the thin  
And sheep-like face of the committee head,  
His form of putty hunched in limp retreat,  
John pondered, and before the dawn was red  
His course was plain; there was no more to win  
When smug compliance makes one play the cheat  
To the clear light within.

*John Hathaway*

97

His action was a lance-stroke. Merely a line  
He scribbled to the Board; but his fingers shook,  
As he wrote, with more than one odd jerk and hook,  
Three syllables, "I resign!"

VI

Where would he go? Once more a longing blazed  
For the great freedom of the sun-burnt hills,  
Where altars of the oak and larch were raised  
Far from the thrust and fume of envious wills.  
Here, where the human torrent frothed and raced,  
The reverent mind could not be understood  
As by the genie of the roadless waste,  
The mute and listening spirit of a wood.  
Into the silence, into the holy vast,  
One might return, like Moses long ago,  
To leave the flock, and talk with God at last,  
And feel the fountain of all knowledge flow  
Out of a sunken source. Never from man,  
But from the self's own secret-bubbling springs,  
One might have glimpses of the Light and Plan  
And Author of all things.  
So John, escaping like a slave from walls,  
Turned to the forests, cliffs and waterfalls,  
Courting the phoenix, Peace. And wandering there  
Among pine-needed mountainsides, he found  
The old abandoned farm, looking so fair  
With lakes and dark, spired groves to rim it round,  
He claimed it; bought it; let it fix his days  
Along weird lines, in patterns not foreseen.

Now, like a convalescent, made serene  
On many-vistaed slopes and leafy ways,  
Slowly he healed the wound, and slowly rose  
Back to awareness of the vast repose  
Under the waves, behind the tempest throes.



But man he still distrusted, and no more  
Offered his heart to man, nor told in speech  
Those eagle-winged perceptions, out of reach  
Of all but brother spirits. Yet what door  
Opened for brother spirits? Sooner take  
The warm dumb confidence in a sheepdog's eyes,  
With love untroubled by the incurable ache  
Of self and pride, and deaf to compromise.  
With never a friend to share  
The churnings in his breast,  
He climbed the mountain stair,  
Or watched the phoebe's nest.  
And seasons dawned and died,  
Thunder and snow and hail,  
While still, with a random stride,  
He followed a hermit trail.  
Sometimes, indeed, upon a high rock-cone,  
With rumpled blue-green counties at his feet,  
Or in a breathless twilight wood alone,  
He heard the silence, organ-voiced, repeat  
The message of the timeless: under all  
The sorrow and strife of years, the loss and change,  
There is a meaning that the leaves recall,  
A purpose that the still and stony range,  
The perennial grasses honor. To some end  
Beyond the shuttered judgment-rooms of sense,  
The stars, the mountains, and wild creatures trend,  
And man, controlled by some omnipotence  
Felt in stray dreams and visions, has a share  
In that Desire for which the sun-swarms glare,  
A goal the struggles of his suffering road,  
In grim tuition, distantly prepare.

Such was the faith, and such the revelation  
That lit a candle in the solitude.  
But man has need of man; the deprivation  
Of human warmth is dire as want of food.

*John Hathaway*

99

And human warmth, like some heartbreaking love  
 Remembered by an island castaway,  
 Was barred by sundering seas; he could not shove  
 His shipwrecked vessel back to yesterday;  
 He could not rescue foundered faith, nor save  
 The frank, uncalled self of years ago,  
 Nor drag old murdered ardor from her grave,  
 Nor fish, from inky bottoms leagues below,  
 His priestly pride of service. Never again  
 Would he dash forth along the elbowing street  
 To dare the insults and the stabs of men;  
 And if he felt half-living, half-complete  
 For lack of comrades chattering at his side,  
 Laughter of babes, and woman's healing touch,  
 At least the trees were tall, the world was wide,  
 And tranquil hours, more gracious than a bride,  
 Would smile, and teach him much.

Sober as faith these words that seemed to start  
 Out of his lacerated, crusted heart  
 From some old wound that never ceased to smart:

"Master of Worlds! sometimes I think  
 That he whose fumbling hand may lead  
 A child, or nurse a beggar's need,  
 Has found a clue to truth, a link  
 To light beyond the loftiest creed.

"Sometimes I think a cottage porch  
 Illumined by a smile or nod,  
 Has more of grace, has more of God,  
 Than all the words of seers, whose torch  
 Irradiates the peak and clod.

"Despite my lacks, O Lord of All!  
 Out of aloneness I may drain  
 Fragments the house-bound never gain,



Glimmers through crannies in the wall  
That guards Thy bright and timeless fane.

"Fragments! and even the wisest soul,  
Clutching at stars, may find no more!  
On fluttering wings that will not soar  
We seek for signallings of the Whole  
That beacons from no mortal shore!"

Now, while the shadow-lidded eyes were turned  
To high, far-circling ridges, there arose  
A plaint from depths that passionately burned:  
"Regrets are chaff, yet how I envy those  
Whose lives are given to serve; whose hands retrieve  
Pain-riddled bodies, twisted souls that grieve!"  
And as he spoke, my gaze was bent anew  
Back on those streets where motors fumed and flew,  
And a mild woman's features met my view.

## PART X

### GRACE BLACKMOOR

#### I

Dingily red, the five-tiered sooty brick,  
Row after row, row after treeless row,  
Was varied by the dirt-gray fire escapes,  
With concrete courts below;  
While bedclothes leered in limp and dangling shapes  
From windows, and the grime and dust lay thick  
On sills and stoops. The offended atmosphere,  
Stagnant and steamy in the broiled July,  
Shrieked with a blend of odors: fish and beer,  
Pickles and sweat, and some that seemed to cry  
Of death and putrefaction. Yet the crowd,  
Down whose soiled brows the perspiration ran,  
Bickered and shoved; and motor horns were loud;  
And under blazing shop-lights, many a man  
Grinned at a counter. On the jolting street,  
The fruit-and-trinket laden pushcarts swayed,  
And tatter-shirted urchins screamed and played,  
Or gathered, in some basement's grilled retreat,  
To smoke and quarrel. Fetid as a tomb,  
And hot as a ship's galley, sunk in gloom  
Of eclipsing towers, airless as a cave,  
And timber-black, was many an ancient room;  
And there, with lined high brow, and features grave  
But often smiling, and a warming look  
In her compassionate, wrinkled, tired old face,  
As though her welcoming love reached out, and took  
The world in its embrace,  
A woman hastened.



Veined and thin, her hand  
Now touched a gasping child's red fever-brow,  
Charming the pain to nothingness; and now  
She brought a bag of food, or with sharp words  
Battled a landlord's rude unjust demand  
To fling a family, like unnested birds,  
With all its poor pathetic treasured wares,  
Forth to the merciless street. I saw her tramp  
By pawnshops, poolhalls, bars, up rickety stairs,  
And down to cellar lairs,  
And into bedrooms where the hot gas-lamp  
Bespoke a vanished era. Mothers wept  
Upon her arm, and wizened children came  
To give their sorrows to her pitying care;  
And blue-lipped men, after long vigils kept  
In dives and jails; and youths of evil fame;  
And daughters of vice and shame,  
The blind, the crippled moaning in despair,  
The jobless, the bereaved, all took a share  
Of her overflowing bounty. To the eye  
That saw her shuffling through the dust and heat,  
Or daring the rainstorms that a blackened sky  
Splashed down in thunder on the deluged street,  
She seemed a more than human thing: her dress  
Of pigeon gray, her gray old hat of straw,  
Hid the white sparkle of an angel's tress  
Serving a higher law.

## II

Yet in her flowering long-departed May,  
When joy the butterfly had frisked, and hope  
Frolicked along a budding bluebell slope,  
Nothing was further from the dreams that lay  
Under the fluttery young heart, than this,  
This long dark bondage in the dank abyss.  
Sky-bright her aspiration, nursed within

The big tall-ceilinged brownstone house, among  
The stuffed rich furnishings whereto her kin  
Jealously clung.  
There with affectionate zeal she plied the bow,  
And while her quivering sonatas sang  
As with the blended and harmonious flow  
Of universal grief and love, and rang  
With power beyond her own, she often felt  
An instrument of some all-seeing Mind,  
An organ of that eloquence which dwelt  
Not in herself, and not in drab mankind,  
But in a deeper fountain. Year on year,  
Music, in billows of delight, would beat —  
So she believed; and most who heard her play  
Swore that a radiant concert-stage career  
Was calling; while her masters would repeat  
Their praises, and foretell the resplendent day  
When her renown, a gale, would sweep the land.

That day drew near . . . within a noted hall,  
She'd make her bow . . . for hundreds to applaud. . .  
But fate, the corkscrew-twister, took a hand,  
And with one random gesture, shattered all  
As by a headman's sword.  
The accident of a moment, which a thread  
Might have averted, dealt the fatal stroke,  
And hurled into a dry-rock riverbed  
The car wherein she speeded. . . . For a space  
Time vanished. . . . Then she woke  
Painfully in an ether-reeking place,  
And learned the ultimate horror: not alone  
One hip was broken — that, in time, would heal —  
But several fingers, shattered to the bone,  
Never again would feel  
The gliding bow, the murmurous violin!  
The delicate touch she'd toiled so hard to win  
Had slipped from her forever! In the shock



Of that discovery — crueller than the blow  
 That mangled her limbs against uncaring rock —  
 First she was numbed, a broken thing, as though  
 Hollowed and bloodless; then such agony burst  
 Across her that she fervently wished to die;  
 And with pale trembling lips that mutely cursed,  
 She flung and flung the unanswered question, "Why,  
 Why am I singled out, and ripped and torn,  
 Mangled and flayed? O Lord, what have I done  
 That clawing hands have clutched my neck, and shorn  
 My happiness, scarce begun,  
 And stripped me bare; snatched off my plumes and wings;  
 And left me as a lark without the voice that sings?"

In the same car of ruin-dealing fate  
 Some riders — so the nurses let her know —  
 Hardly were bruised; their fingers, firm and straight,  
 That need not tune a string nor guide a bow,  
 Were still unblemished. Destiny, it seemed,  
 Was a malignant fox that slew and schemed,  
 And, finding what its victim most esteemed,  
 Slashed it, and gnawed it. — Such the acid thought  
 Corroding her in those first days of pain,  
 When sour self-pity, vitriol squirting, brought  
 Poison to heart and brain.  
 Then, had she let her virulence persist  
 And suck her life, as many another would,  
 Her future might indeed have been a mist  
 Empty of good.  
 But suffering unlatched a secret door  
 Deeper than bitterness, through caves that led  
 To the hot sympathy within life's core,  
 A fellowship the shop and ballroom floor  
 Darken or cancel.

As she moped abed,  
 Walled in the hospital while slow months lagged,

And watched her sisters wheeled or carried past,  
And stared dismayed, aghast,  
Upon the legless wretch, the face that sagged,  
The limp and wilted limbs; and as she saw  
The scarred old dame who, wheezily breathing, lay  
With skullbone cheeks and low, dog-hanging jaw,  
And one with features dried as sun-baked clay,  
And arms like knotted sticks; and as her ears  
Grew used to moans and sighs, and learned the sound  
Of muffled midnight weeping, then her tears  
Gathered for sorrows not her own, and rose  
From depths more elemental and profound  
Than private woes.

Almost she seemed to touch the timeless source,  
The pity of the Universal Heart,  
From which all love, all kindness, all remorse,  
All yearning goodness flow. She seemed a part  
Of some great Will above her personal lot  
That made her throb, and long to bring a smile  
To the wan sufferer on the furthest cot,  
And peace to that poor babbler down the aisle,  
And comfort to the breast  
Of the bowed mother with the daughter lamed,  
And benedictions for the gray oppressed  
Whom never a comrade claimed,  
And joy to patients clawed by the dire disease  
Men know as poverty, — old, nag-like wrecks,  
With colorless eyes washed out, and scrawny necks  
Like those of chickens plucked, and looks like pleas  
To an unmindful world.

Oh, to all these,  
And others such as these, the bruised and bent,  
She must go forth, to succor and console  
In the clay hovel and the tenement,  
And bring a soothing hand, a healing dole.  
Her own adversities; her own sore loss



Of a starred coronal to cap her days —  
 What could they matter? — each sustains his cross!  
 More than the auditorium's bubble-praise,  
 More even than the high, clear, singing strain  
 Of her impassioned bow — more than delight  
 Or crowned ambition, was the touch that calms  
 The gasping throat, the wrinkled brow of pain,  
 And brings the dawn to sufferers in the night.  
 Her ears resounded with the peal of psalms;  
 Her moist eyes glistened; silently a prayer  
 Came from the pallid, cast-bound girl: that she  
 Might learn to serve, might fittingly prepare  
 For selfless deeds to be.

Not that the ghost of lone, night-born regret  
 Never would haunt her; not that she would leap  
 God-like above misfortune, and forget  
 Fond dead ambition. Often in dreams of sleep  
 She saw herself upon a platform, standing  
 Above the still, tense rows of shadowy forms,  
 Queen of the magic of the bow, commanding  
 Men's grief to wail or plead, and hope in storms  
 To tremble like a wind from the sublime.  
 And often, in the dreams of day, she saw  
 A miracle, by which new light in time  
 Would bring new healing, through some higher law  
 That cured her battered hands, and let her play  
 The old dear glorious melodies anew.  
 But swiftly she'd awake, and fold from view  
 Those temptress visions that could but delay  
 And trip her on her road. No! she must pass  
 The fateful gap, and look not back again,  
 And leave the sighs, the luxury of "Alas!"  
 For other maids and men.

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## III

Scorning the complaints of all who loved her best,  
She took the intended trail, when she had learned  
Once more to walk; and feeling richly blest  
Even to rise, she kept firm lips compressed,  
And, battling forward, never quailed nor turned.  
Then all the keen ambitious force, the drive  
That once had made her mistress of the bow,  
The leaping eagerness, the faith, the glow,  
Blended to keep her great new zeal alive.  
And time wore on; and in her patient care  
To knock with healing at the doors of grief,  
And bring the maimed relief,  
And ease the drooping eyelids of despair,  
Seldom she noticed that she was no more  
Than one amid a vague anonymous corps  
Of workers; she had little mood or time  
For the gnat-pricks of self. Nor did she shed  
Too many tears when, winding past her prime,  
She saw spring visions fade to autumn red,  
And knew no lover's form would ever nest  
Against her sheltering breast,  
Nor tiny lips bend kisses to her own.  
And though her friends, with puckered brows, would sigh,  
And rue her briny years, her hopes gone by,  
From her own gaze a light, an ardor shone,  
And, strangely, her submergence of the *I*  
Earned her a calm, as near to happiness  
As one may climb for whom a world's distress  
Vibrates at elbow distance. She had come,  
If not to joy, at least to clear content  
Out of the valleys of her martyrdom.  
Nor did she question what life's tumult meant,  
Nor ponder if the Scheme of Things were good,  
Nor if the Weaver of the Scheme were wise.  
Love-driven, in devoted sisterhood



To all that breathes and dies,  
She knew, she knew, by the pity in her heart,  
By her throbbing at the wry-faced infant's woe,  
By the world-mantling warmth that seemed to start  
From bottomless depths — she knew, she had to know  
All that she touched could be at most a ray  
Out of some vast benevolence that lay  
Beyond herself — an ocean of light that washed  
The dusky shore-line of man's tortuous way.

And if the violin that long ago  
She dropped forever, could again be found,  
This is the tune the resurrected bow  
Most fittingly might sound:

"In other lives my life is led,  
In others' sorrow, love and loss.  
I throb, I ache with others' dread,  
And toss in pain when others toss.  
For others' want I bear a cross,  
And when the noons of hope are bright,  
I pant, I thrill beneath their light!

"In others' plenty is my joy,  
In others' pleasure burns my bliss.  
I tingle for the gutter boy  
Who climbs above the mired abyss,  
And mount a personal precipice  
With every girl I help to raise  
From alley slime to sunny ways.

"When others fall, I feel the bruise;  
And when they rise again, I rise;  
The mother weeping at the news  
Of rescued sons, has dimmed my eyes;  
And if some balm that I devise  
Brings light to cheeks where shadows frowned,  
Then grandly, proudly am I crowned.

"But what is there for me, you ask,  
In striving, striving without pause?  
Only completion of the Task,  
Only fulfillment of the Cause,  
Only the furtherance of those laws  
By which the best in man may shine  
Out of the Ageless and Divine!"

"And oh," she said, "there is not one of all  
Time's travelers that I envy, though it's true  
My life is steeped in homely things and small,  
And often I wonder how it feels to view  
Larger, impersonal worlds, of which the few  
Are given glimpses." . . . As she spoke, my gaze  
Turned far away, to one on whom a blaze  
Of light had gathered, while his eyes withdrew  
Into a myriad-layered ancient maze.



PART XI  
BRUNO VOLLMER

I

His world was not the world of other men,  
The tablelands of labor and exchange.  
The breathing universe was his to range;  
His castle was a fuming, vial-filled den.  
I saw him stooping, clad in aproned white,  
Over the microscopic slide where lay  
The small stained specimen that might convey  
Hints of man's rise from Mesozoic night.  
I saw his hands prepare  
Bacterial cultures, and his eyes regard  
A frog or fungus, or a wisp of hair,  
Leaflet or straw, or beetle's horny shard.  
And, peering at these minor clues and signs, —  
This riddle language marked on nature's slate, —  
He sought to read beneath the visible lines  
Of time and fate,  
And trace the growth and fall  
Of tribes and dynasties of sentient things,  
Of some that cleave the billows, some that crawl,  
And some that curve on wings;  
And piecing together the parts by slow degrees,  
He hoped to plumb the sea-deep mysteries  
Of men and worms.

Slender and short the man,  
Bespectacled, with a falcon's piercing eyes,  
Lips bitinglly compressed, and face dark-tan  
From field excursions under shrivelling skies.  
Seeing his far-withdrawn yet focused gaze  
And sparkling countenance, I had the sense

Of one to whom the whole world's crush and craze  
Were less than a fern, a pansy's innocence;  
And I perceived the furrows on his brow  
Were not from pain at man, and man's distress,  
But from long brooding on the What and How  
Of weeds, and prowlers in the wilderness.  
Always his empire was as wide as life,  
And never a snail, a clam, a sponge, a fly,  
Was too obscure for his dissecting knife,  
Too humble for his echoed challenge, Why?  
First in his student days,  
Sharp as a sizzling prod, the question rose,  
What, what the meaning of this life that grows  
In ocean, earth and air? that bleeds and slays,  
That nurses, frolics, preys,  
That grovels, pants, endures? that weaves a nest  
Or builds a hive? and scuffles without rest  
Only to live, or carry on the quest  
To daughter generations? Is this all  
Some blind, unpurposeful tug at matter's heart,  
Mechanical as a raindrop's urge to fall?  
Or is man fashioned for some richer part  
Than the blank grave-mould? Let him search and probe  
Deep in the arcane lore from nature's hand,  
The embryo, the leaf, the cerebral lobe,  
The lizard's leathery robe,  
That he might read the message; understand  
If flesh is lord, and this live conscious force  
A puff of foam, a vapping from the dust;  
Or if an essence from some kinglier source  
Surcharges the swell and thrust  
Of life, and vindicates the inherent trust  
In light beyond the clay



## II

And so his road  
 Was simple from the time when first the towers  
 Of college closed around him, and a goad  
 Of wonder bade him study rocks and flowers,  
 Mosses and algae, and the snake and toad.  
 Only one barricade he had to leap,  
 One spiky fence before his path ran clear.  
 Yet to his eyes it jutted Alpine-steep,  
 Casting a fog across his twentieth year.  
 By that odd whim of fate whereby a child  
 May match his parent more in flesh than mind,  
 He and his father, rarely reconciled,  
 Were like conflicting species of mankind.  
 There came a day of thunder when they stood  
 In the old living-room, before the fire,  
 Under the ceiling's beamed and panelled wood,  
 Among brown stuffy sofas. Grief and ire  
 Shone in that round owl-face, distracted now  
 Under the iron gray of dwindling hair;  
 Creases, like hieroglyphics, scrawled the brow  
 With anguish and bewilderment and despair.  
 Stubborn the thrust of chin, yet in the eyes  
 Of worn, tormented greenish-blue there glowed  
 Less of resentment than of shocked surprise  
 When Bruno stammered: "Father — like a load  
 One thought has weighed me down. I cannot tread  
 The lane you pick, nor follow you as head  
 Of that great lumber company you've led  
 Since I was born."

Like one an arrow has stung  
 The father started up, and yet at first  
 Mildly rebuked, "My boy, you still are young,  
 And when these windy fantasies have burst  
 No doubt you'll waken!"

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"They're not fantasies!

Father, I've struggled, but the more I strive  
The deeper the mesh. I cannot look on trees  
As planks and shingles, but as things alive  
That marvelously breathe and breed and grow.  
And when, head down, I seek to estimate  
By mere board feet, a straining, flattening weight  
Squeezes my neck.

"You may believe it so!"

The old man answered, while the sad eyes drooped,  
And shoulders, twitching and shaking, sagged and stooped.  
"But son, do not suppose  
That you or I or any man can take  
Only the trail that goes  
To heavens where no feet or eardrums ache.  
I've labored hard. Younger than you today,  
I drove my axe into the tottering pine  
On craggy mountains; and I've smashed my way  
With axe-strokes always. What is mine is mine  
Because I've earned it. Yet one dear ambition  
Sweetened my days, and gave me will and might:  
To forge my son a fortress-firm position;  
To build my business like a castled height  
That would stand shining when I'd left the fight.  
And I'd succeeded — so, at least, I felt,  
And might lie down content, but for this stroke  
Which your own indiscriminate hand has dealt."

He paused; the well-hewn form, sturdy as oak,  
Swayed slightly, and the iron head bent low.  
And Bruno, in pain and pity, yearned to lift  
A soothing hand to soften, to turn the blow,  
But knew that what was asked was not the gift  
Of the hand's devotion, but the very core,  
The sap, the bloom and fruitage of his days.  
Better than such a loss, a closing door,  
A parting of the ways!



Never, through all the years, would he forget  
 His father's tortured smile, the clasp he gave,  
 Struggling against himself. "Well, son, success!"  
 And never, through the years, would he regret  
 His choice, though even from beyond the grave  
 Two blue-green eyes reproached with the old distress.  
 Yet but for this ghost-dim unhappiness  
 He could recall no steep impediment  
 Piled by misfortune in the path of hope.  
 But by the scalpel and the microscope  
 He lived, and found content.  
 And in the laboratory's cloistral peace,  
 Walled from the clamor of contentious hordes,  
 He took but passing note of the dark caprice  
 Of men and nations, market brawls and swords.

Not that he need deny the boons that life  
 Had laid on other laps; not that he rode  
 Homeward at evening to his sons and wife  
 Less glad than others at a snug abode  
 And small delights and laughter. Not that he threw  
 With an indifferent shrug each added wreath  
 Of honor off, or monkishly withdrew  
 Into a cell, or hid behind a sheath.  
 Not that no midnight, paced in slow despair,  
 When formulas failed and knowledge seemed a cheat,  
 Found him red-lidded, shadowed by defeat;  
 Not that man's ancient legacy of care, —  
 Illness that brooded in beloved eyes;  
 Accident stabbing; grief that blurred the skies, —  
 Never made gray his moments. Yet he earned  
 From each Odyssean questing for the light,  
 Adventure, and a joy that freshly burned;  
 And each discovery shouldering back the night  
 Thrilled with Columbus visions. Many the gleams  
 He shed along the highway as he sloped  
 Nearer the sunset; but his dream of dreams,

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The port for which he most devoutly hoped,  
Remained unwon: he still could not decide  
What Cause lay buried deep at matter's root,  
And if man's spirit were the flower or fruit,  
Or but a wraith born of desire and pride.  
Balked by conflicting clues,  
And roads that bent now left, now right, now left,  
He saw the truth as through an altering cleft  
In a dark screen; he glimpsed it but to lose  
Its luster in immensities out of reach,  
While all researchers were as blind men fumbling  
For a lost shell along a limitless beach.

And yet, despite the groping, halting and stumbling,  
Despite the intricate trails  
Winding to precipice walls that no man scales,  
Scarcely a day went by  
Without new coaxing fires; scarcely a night  
But that he would descry  
Tomorrow's vistas beckoning, bridge and height,  
In glamour and enticement. Not the climb  
To the starred summit drove his feet with zest  
So much as the dream, the hope to reach in time  
A dominating crest.

Though on his lips no tune was ever sung,  
It seemed to me a hidden bow was strung,  
And these the words that from his heart were wrung:

"One of the lantern bearers  
And bringers of the light,  
I climb through pale sierras  
Of ridged and ghostly night.  
And where the years are flowing  
In an endless caravan,  
I lift a radiance, glowing  
On all the tribes of man.



"In forests weird with wonder  
And seas of gray surmise,  
Where even the captains blunder  
With lightning-dazzled eyes;  
In marshes dim for ages  
With mystery and fear,  
I roam with saints and sages  
To make the pathway clear.

"Interpreter translating  
The script of gods unknown,  
I seek the hand creating  
Lore of the leaf and stone.  
And though with black obsession  
Or a heaven-kindled spark,  
I lead in the long procession  
Of soldiers against the Dark."

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## PART XII

### THROUGH THE RIFTED VEIL

#### I

Now upon other men, and others still,  
My gaze went flashing; and I followed lives  
Feathered like pigeon wings, or edged like knives,  
Ruled by a lazy drift, or torrent will.  
I saw the rancher as he strolled content  
In fragrant valleys where the orange grew,  
And never asked what life and struggle meant,  
Nor wandered from the trail that crowds pursue.  
I saw the shopbound clerk,  
Who week on week counted his coins and wares,  
But save for thought of dinner, play and work,  
Was free of cares;  
I saw the housewife with her pots and broom,  
Scrubbing a railing, mopping clean a floor,  
Within her ears her progeny's gleeful roar,  
And in her mind no room  
For meditations on man's aim or doom,  
But only worries as to meat and flour  
And Baby's nursing hour.  
I saw the truckman, sweaty and profane,  
Heaving at crates, his mind not traveling far  
Beyond the corner bar  
And moments when, with titillated brain,  
He'd hear some tavern Venus entertain.  
I saw the greased mechanic in his shop,  
Wooing no goal but labor aptly done;  
Wine, and amusement with a wife or son;  
Fishing or cards . . . till the last curtain's drop.  
I saw the scholar pore



Above dark crumbling manuscripts, and find  
 In shadowy alcoves of dead, shadowy lore,  
 Peace for the heart, and solace for the mind.  
 I saw the merchant bid  
 Within the grilled exchange and jeweled booth;  
 And, haggling, never guess what barriers hid  
 The domes of truth.  
 I saw the sleeve-patched beggar of the street,  
 Happier-eyed as he bowed and plucked a penny  
 Than often a sleek, fur-collared one, and many  
 Who sneered at his defeat.  
 I saw the hunter, blood-mad as a beast;  
 I saw the warrior, with his leopard thrust;  
 I saw the vagabond; I saw the priest  
 Whose marriage to heaven could not quench the lust  
 Of the rebellious flesh; I saw the sage;  
 I saw the cobbler, salesman, teacher, clown,  
 Tender of inns, and trooper of the stage,  
 Men brightly famed, and men of no renown,  
 The miner cooped below,  
 The diver in the sea,  
 The doll of the fashion show  
 And buzzing social bee;  
 But in them all, though far apart they seemed  
 As eels from elephants, or terns from trout,  
 Never I met one constant lamp that beamed  
 To show what all man's turmoil was about.

Only by fragments, like the scattered bits  
 Of some great puzzle one may put in place  
 Doubtfully, with much tugging at the wits,  
 There dawned before my eyes a hazy face  
 I took for truth. Bewilderingly I'd found  
 Which men, like lovers, flew to life's embrace,  
 Which cowered and shook, like mongrels in a pound.  
 The actress moon-struck by the puffs and glare,  
 The drooling lips and clattering acclaim,

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Had only reached a speedway to despair  
Sprung of her fame.

The painter, prisoned in his cliff retreat  
Where all his art lay stillborn, had no trust,  
While the unlooked-at canvas gathered dust,  
That life was not a hoax, a crazed deceit.  
The financier, whose grayhound legs had chased  
The bloody hare of fortune, had not won  
More than a treadmill, where, the more he raced,  
The more he had to run.

And the far-rover, trailing those kindred fires,  
Change and Adventure, could not earn content,  
More than the maid who, drowning her life desires,  
Moiled in conventional walls, forever pent  
Beyond green usefulness, a sacrifice  
To predatory arms. And one whose god  
Was power, paid a spirit-withering price,  
And heavily, on his own proud head, the rod  
Of sovereignty descended. He, as well,  
Who haunted the tinkling balustrades of pleasure,  
Pressed to his lips but foam, a bubble treasure  
That, bursting, left an acrid taste behind.  
And he who, loathing the idolatrous crowd,  
Bitterly fled the altars of mankind,  
Beheld, within the mountain, lake and cloud,  
A peace and light; yet some live force inside  
Remained unsatisfied.

Nearer some ultimate boon, some ultimate grace  
Was she who, in the asphalt barrens, toiled  
For sufferers man and circumstance despoiled;  
And nearer, also, to some templed place  
Of joy and understanding, he whose hours  
Were given to searching for the hooded powers  
Behind the nerves and flesh, the winds and roots and flowers.



## II

Slowly, like hills unfolding through a rain,  
 The lines, the pattern of the whole grew plain.  
 I saw that he who trails an enchantress fire  
 Under the gilded arc-lamps, will acquire  
 A dagger in the flesh, a noose, a chain.  
 For though he crave full coffers or renown,  
 The barroom's bluster, lily-plumed display,  
 The oozy sword of triumph, or a crown,  
 He walks a mocking way.  
 Some shadowy countermander of his aim,  
 Some leering nemesis with dragon teeth,  
 Crouches ahead in ambush, bound to claim  
 The coveted pot of gold, the promised wreath.  
 And fate, that watches slyly as a lynx,  
 Will tempt him round a vicious circle's rim,  
 While each new draught of conquest that he drinks,  
 Like brine to a drying throat, but teases him  
 To stronger potions . . . making him as one  
 Who tries to drain all radiance from the sun,  
 All water from the tide, and cannot flee  
 The deeps of his own black vacuity.

Happier they who with no scourging drive  
 For witch-lights glimmering on the cloud or peak,  
 Shepherd their flocks across the plain, and strive  
 For what the millions seek:  
 Children and home; and, after work, repose,  
 The dooryard garden, and the rambler rose,  
 Clasp of a mate, and, at the long day's close,  
 Dreams of a sweet tomorrow. Happy, too,  
 They who, grown self-oblivious, stretch their hands  
 To frail lost brothers floundering in the sands;  
 And happy they, the bright Hesperian few,  
 Who have some great impersonal work to do,  
 The scientist whose glass

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Searches the microbe's face,  
And he who tests the mass  
Of the white-hot suns of space;  
The seer who probes the Cause;  
The artist who creates  
Obedient to no laws  
But those the perennial love of art dictates;  
And all who make a bridge, a book, a song,  
Not for the lip-approval of the throng  
But the delight of building. This should be  
Blazoned cloud-high for all the world to see:  
The man who travels most content, with wings  
Above the pits and swamps of *mine* and *me*,  
Is nearest to the hidden Heart of Things,  
And closest to the cool, pellucid springs  
Of the undying Aim.

III

And now there poured  
Out of all fluctuant lives that I had viewed,  
One mingled tone, one blended chant that soared  
As from a source above the multitude:

"Beyond the visible walls of mind and sense,  
We hear a language ancient as the trees  
That speaks in mute, unsyllabled eloquence  
Of fate and breath and immortalities.  
Its warnings and commandments, voiced unbidden,  
That clamor from a tongue profoundly hidden,  
Echo for men and barn-owls, moles and bees:

"Press on! Press on! and keep the fire alive  
Within the ancient hearth beneath the breast!  
Press on! though whirlwinds daze and lightnings dive  
And all the fledglings flutter from the nest!  
Press on, though hopes be blowing straws that scatter,



And love and home, like pearly bubbles, shatter,  
And only darkness greets the footsore quest!

"Press on and live! no matter where or how!  
No matter if your flesh be gouged by spears!  
No matter if your harnessed neck must bow  
Under the whip and bridle of the years!  
No matter if you limp in rags, as lonely  
As one marooned on polar snow, with only  
A sheet between him and the ice-wind's jeers!

"Press on! no matter if you gnaw a crust,  
And sleep with rats low in the basement mould!  
No matter if your friends and kin be dust,  
You mansion toppled, and your honor sold!  
No matter if hot sizzling tongs may rack you,  
And terror taunt, and tiger claws attack you,  
And blizzards maul, and turn you blue with cold!

"Press on! in barracks, prison, hut and cave,  
To live, to breathe the purifying air!  
Scornful of cuts; beyond all reason, brave —  
Only to be, to struggle and to bear!  
From ages when, beneath a tepid ocean,  
Wriggled the first wee thing with breath and motion,  
This order trumpets, 'Creatures, live and dare!'

"And life, with fierce unanimous will, complies.  
The mouse that cat-paws mockingly flip and throw  
Attempts to run; the wounded sparrow flies,  
All bloody-winged, to mothering brush below.  
The lizard playing dead, the hidden spider,  
The scuttling snake, the scurrying water-strider,  
Desire to live — and that is all they know.

"True, man will sometimes, with a noose or knife,  
Smother the flame within. But see how one

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*Through the Rifted Veil*

123

Leaps from a bridge to die, yet swims for life;  
One plans a bullet-death, and flees a gun.  
And that so few, though hollowed by privation,  
Will seek the short, dark road beyond creation,  
Attests how well the threads of Law are spun.

"And deeper yet! the white-hot breeding urge!  
The charge of rams that clash with murderous wills!  
The cataract-vaulting salmon's upward surge!  
The robin stuffing ravenous baby bills!  
The wasp, by whose skilled numbing ministration,  
Live flesh is stored for a later generation!  
The mantis sire in the love embrace that kills!

"All blind! The stallion, in its rutting rage,  
Views not and values not the colt to be.  
The drone but claims an instinctive heritage  
In its betrothal flight; the acacia tree  
Clouded with saffron bloom, the blossoming mallow,  
Bespeak the drive of life that, rarely fallow,  
Buds for a still-unborn futurity.

"Not on the pages of the knowing mind,  
But on life's dark and elemental core,  
Indelibly the Master Scribe has signed  
The sword-inscriptions of the oldest lore.  
And if it cry not of a Use in being,  
A far-off goal beyond surmise or seeing,  
Then men are ghosts, and walk a phantom shore.

"Many there are who will not trust the light  
Consulted by the oracle deep within,  
Who see all wisdom as a meteor flight,  
All meaning mocked by doom's satiric grin.  
Yet every shoot of the rippling mountain grasses,  
Each screaming crow, each quail that whirrs and passes,  
Tells eagerly of guerdons still to win.



"The gnat gay-circling in a sunlit dream,  
The snapping puppy and the frolicking hare,  
The trout, like streaking shadows in a stream,  
The humming-bird vibrating, poised in air,  
The whizzing dragonfly, the vulture wheeling  
With loops and drifts against a pale-blue ceiling,  
Hint of a joy profounder than despair.

"And shall the lamp that guides the fox and deer  
And leads the swallow, not suffice for man?  
No! for he claims an ampler atmosphere,  
Though traveling in the same life-caravan.  
And to his world, his world of tears and ashes,  
At times there come, by starry glints and flashes,  
Suggestions of the Pattern and the Plan.

"Suggestions only! transient cracks that mark  
The blackout windows of the Timeless Whole!  
When fugitively man may glimpse a spark  
Out of abysses of his own veiled soul,  
And, lightning-sudden, shines a rift of wonder  
That splits the curtained universe asunder  
And bids the Law and Mystery unroll.

"Sometimes, before the hermit in the wood,  
Out of the streams and rocks the vision flows;  
Sometimes for him who toils in brotherhood  
To the gray beggar, and the blind man's woes;  
Or for the seer, occultly meditating  
On wings that pass too weirdly for relating,  
A taper from the Immortal Beacon glows.

"And who is wise enough to say that faith,  
Which guides the living pulse of men and oaks,  
Is but a Moloch made of fog, a wraith  
That dupes the ages with dream-woven cloaks,  
While all that breathe, in blindness and confusion,



*Through the Rifted Veil*

125

Are slaves and pensioners of this illusion? —  
Gargantuan jest! the cosmic joke of jokes!

"No! rather look beneath the walls of sense  
And heed the language ancient as the trees  
That speaks in mute, unsyllabled eloquence  
Of fate and breath and immortalities.  
Its warnings and commandments, voiced unbidden,  
That clamor with a tongue profoundly hidden,  
May lead the wanderer to the ultimate keys!

"So we who weary in the field or street,  
Chasing bat-shadows down a hooting night,  
May hear a cry above the world's deceit,  
And see an ageless lantern flaming bright;  
And winding on, in time's immense procession,  
Move forward grandly, by a slow progression  
To some far Aim, some sure eventual Light."

THE END